

THE SAVAGE
NIKHIL ARTZYBASHEFF

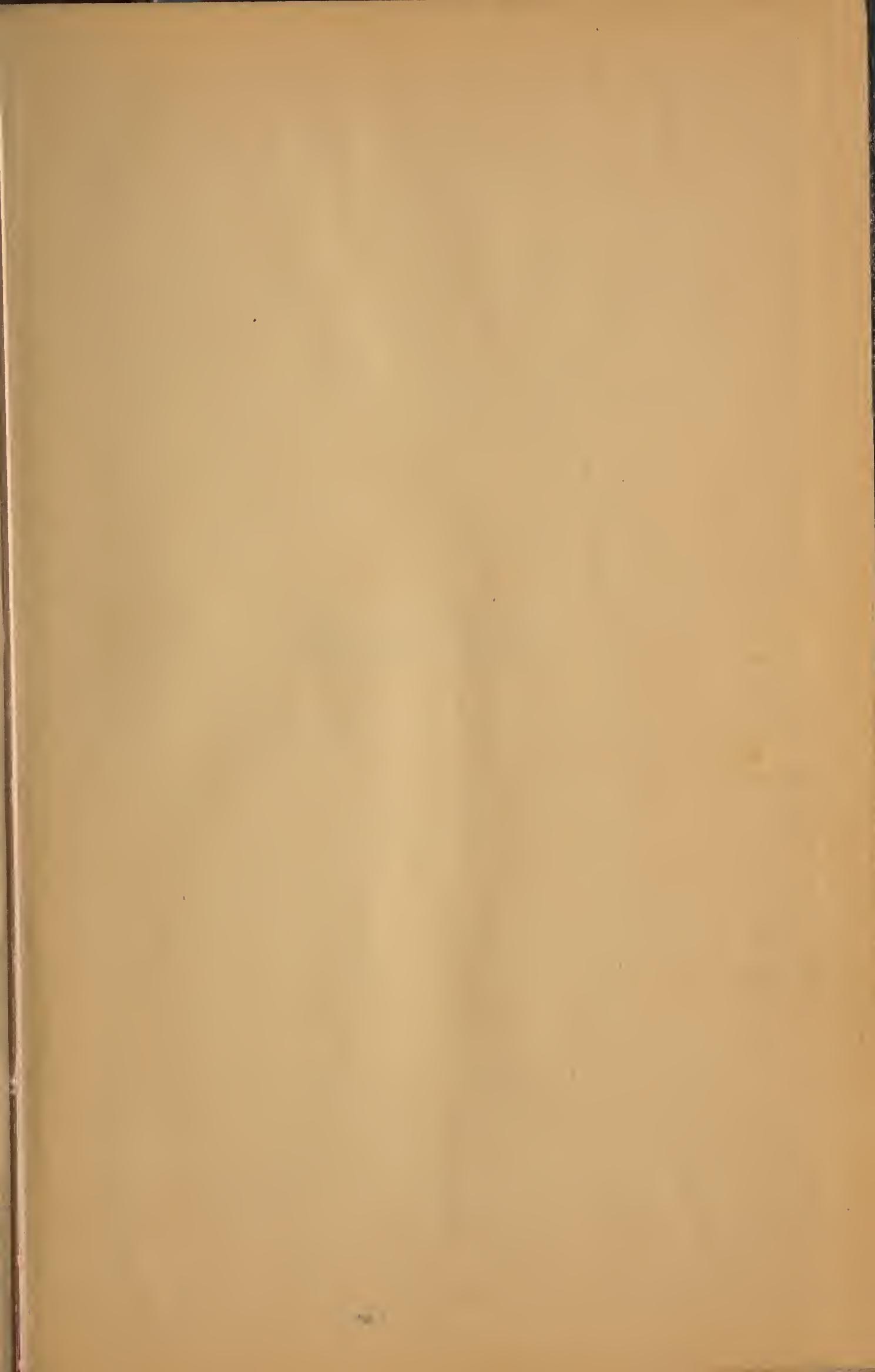


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MIKHAIL ARTZYBASHEFF

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TRANSLATED FROM
THE RUSSIAN BY
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AND
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CHAPTER I

MERCHANT DIKOY's house and yard were situated on a big desolate square where the horse-fair was held once a year, hence its entire surface was permanently covered with hay-grind and soft decomposed manure. The name of the square was Sennoy, which means Haymarket. Through the middle of it ran a half-crumbled earthen-mound and a long ditch with rusty-coloured fetid water that never dried up. It was said that these were the remains of an old Cossack fortress and that a number of human bones had been dug up during the excavations. Stray half savage dogs used to roam on the mound, and quite possibly the yellow bones over which they wrangled were actually human ones.

Scattered randomly around the square were low little houses with grey wooden fences and

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neglected dusty orchards with sickly trees that bore only small sour apples. On one side the square sloped down to a miry little river, tortuously winding and covered with thick-growing sedge. A long wooden bridge, warped and rickety, stumbled over the river and by it stood an ancient smithy with an earthen roof on which green grass grew. At night the wind blew up dampness and pitcoal-smoke from the river, a red fire shone mysteriously in the blacksmith's open doorway, and the dull beat of his hammer echoed far into space. On the other side the square adjoined the Public-Gardens, the only green and shady nook in the town, situated on a monotonous and sandy plain. On holidays the military band played in the Gardens.

Directly opposite the homestead of the Dikoys stretched a long straight street, which reached way out into the open fields and was called Kladbischenskaya—Churchyardroad.

Often funeral processions passed by, at which times the tremulous playing of the

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cracked churchyard-bells would be heard far in the distance.

The house and yard of the Dikoys faced right onto the lonely square and fitted it well. Just as big and desolate they were surrounded by high fences and substantial barns. Heaped up against the fences were logs and empty barrels, and dry steppe grass and hard stinging nettles grew rankly everywhere. The single-storied, red brick-house, raised on a high foundation, looked out upon the square with a row of dark, ever closed windows.

Toward the yard was added to the house a clumsy glass verandah, which was very cold in winter and as hot as an oven in summer. In front of the verandah was the same bare, barren garden as everywhere else, in which grew but a single large tree—a grey, dust-covered willow.

One glance at the homestead, and you knew that here lived torpid gloomy people, who zealously saved every penny they made, devoured vast quantities of fat food, snored in their sleep, never laughed and in drink or anger

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were as savage and terrible as primordial barbarians. It was not merely accidental that their name was Dikoy, which means *savage*.

Old man Dikoy had died long ago, leaving three sons: the eldest, Klim Ivanovich, just as harsh and sluggish and acute in business as his father had been,—the second, Zakhar, a tall blond, happy-go-lucky child of nature,—and the youngest, Petenka, an idiot from birth, a puffy dwarf with a low forehead, little cunning eyes and thick pendulous lips.

Although Klim Ivanovich had taken over the business already while his father was still alive and had control of everything, the acknowledged head of the family was still the widow, Anna Petrovna, a woman of strict orthodox faith, who always wore a little black head cloth and most jealously watched over the family possessions. The whole town knew, feared and respected her, and she was called Mother not only by her sons but by the work-people and the neighbours.

Klim Ivanovich was married and put into severe practice what was his interpretation of his conjugal rights and duties. He had no

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children. Zakhar, unlike the rest of the family, cared little for money, and took no interest in business matters. He was a bachelor and pursued a series of adventures with the lively daughters of the lower middle class. The idiot, Petenka, who distinguished himself by his ape-like lewdness, spent his time chasing the wenches who worked in the fields or in the oil mill of the family. No sooner did a goodlooking newcomer arrive on the fields than Petenka would appear, bleating and panting and trying to slip a cake or sweet into her hand or her bodice. And a few days later, timidly glancing round to see that no one was looking, she would slide into the tall grass where Petenka would be waiting for her. A little while later, sated and elate, he would walk across the courtyard, while the embarrassed girl, upset, alarmed, would creep swiftly round behind the barn and so back to the fields and her companions, with a little gold cross on a blue or red ribbon shining on her sun tanned breast. These girls were called Petenka's "god-children."

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Klim Ivanovich abhorred this misconduct and whenever he found it out, he would drive the girl out with his stick, and threaten Petenka with the swift and complete destruction of all such desires in him.

On one occasion one of these girls became pregnant, and her mother, a market woman, called at the house and lodged a complaint. Klim Ivanovich gave her ten roubles, but that very same night he hunted the idiot out and beat him until he collapsed half dead. While they were throwing cold water over Petenka to bring him to, Klim Ivanovich stood on the threshold, nervously clenching and unclenching his fists and scornfully muttering:

“Never mind. . . . He won’t croak.”

The idiot had been afraid of his eldest brother from childhood, but after this occurrence he loathed him with a deep animal hatred. Of course he could not touch him, but whenever Klim Ivanovich happened to walk about the courtyard attending to his business the idiot, from his hiding place in the tall grass, would follow his brother’s movements like a

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wild beast fiercely and evilly glaring at its tamer.

But Petenka loved, nay, adored, his brother Zakhar who never hurt him, often gave him money for sweets and took him out hunting. The idiot would go wild with delight at a gun shot and when a wounded bird helplessly beat its wings in the reeds, Petenka would catch it with feline dexterity, bite through its neck with his huge yellow teeth, and snarl and growl like a wild cat.. It was a horrible, repulsive sight.

Klim Ivanovich conducted all the family business and kept the books. Zakhar would often live for long stretches of time on the farm on the steppe, supervising the labourers, and he also ran the oil mill which had been built at his suggestion and after his design. Anna Petrovna looked after the house. Petenka loafed about, dallied with the wenches and overfed. The Mother and her eldest-born regarded him as a divine punishment inflicted by God upon the family because of the old man's pride, who had always and everywhere set himself up as first and foremost.

CHAPTER II

KLIM IVANOVICH was much older than Zakhар and Petenka. He was forty-five when he married. Until then he used to say that he had no time for such nonsense, but, on one of his business trips to a neighbouring town, he met Glafira, the daughter of an almost bankrupt merchant; and was suddenly enwrapped in a deep melancholy love for her, which gripped him so strongly that he was plunged in gloom and his expression became more sombre than ever.

Glafira was not tall, but she was slim and supple and handsome, with soft shapely shoulders, small strong hands, thick black eyebrows, and such fresh, sweet lips that when she laughed and showed her white regular teeth she roused happiness in a man and a longing for a kiss just as the sight of clean cool water on a hot summer day rouses thirst.

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Klim Ivanovich's love for his wife was purely physical and it showed itself in an insatiable desire for her. Glafira was a really beautiful woman, while Klim Ivanovich, in spite of his iron constitution and bull-like force, had, with the exception of a few indiscretions, been almost chaste up to the time of his marriage.

The Presbyter of the Cathedral Church in whose parish the Dikoys' house was situated, explained this belated betrothal thus:

"Only his superhuman abstinence can account for it."

Of course a clumsy lout like Klim Ivanovich, who always wore a baggy coat, shiny with grease, and with ragged bulging pockets, could not appeal to a lively coquette like Glafira who had been courted by government officials and even by officers. But the bridegroom was a good match and his proposal was gladly accepted. Glafira tried to protest, but her father gave her a sound thrashing and in the end she resigned herself to her fate.

The wedding was celebrated in the small

town in which her parents lived. Anna Petrovna attended at the ceremony in a gown of dark brown velvet with black fringes. Zakhар was ill at the time with a cold caught on a shooting trip, while Petenka was not taken to the wedding to avoid disgracing the family in front of strangers.

But the idiot was dying to be present at the solemn function, as he had got it into his head that big guns were to be fired. When he was told that he must stay at home, he yelled and raved and flung himself on the floor, and from that time on hated his brother Klim more than ever, holding him responsible for the insult that had been put upon him.

The wedding was magnificent, with full candelabra, a choir, an orchestra and Russian champagne. Glafira wore a white satin bridal gown with a long train and a white veil, while Klim Ivanovich wore a new black frock-coat with a white tie.

The old merchant's house was lit up from top to bottom and the band played full blast without stopping. Dancing couples cast their

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gliding shadows on the windows and in the street below a large crowd of loafers gathered to pass remarks on the bride and bridegroom and their relatives and the wedding guests.

Glafira danced until she dropped. She was unnaturally excited, laughing and flirting, and it was only every now and then that she threw a frightened glance at her husband. She could not admit the idea to herself that this gloomy unpleasant stranger was to be her mate, and she forced herself not to think of it. But the nearer the moment approached for the newly wed couple to be escorted to their bridal chamber, the greater grew the terror and physical anguish that had gripped her so that her hands were cold and her knees gave way beneath her.

The bridal night left Glafira with memories of a ghastly nightmare of pain, shame and disgust. However, when the happy couple drove through the town paying calls in accordance with the immemorial custom, she seemed to be quietly happy as she smiled and bowed, no longer with her girlish vivacity, but with a

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grave dignity becoming to her position as a rich married woman, the wife of a substantial merchant.

The festivities lasted three days and then the happy couple drove home. The old merchant, her father, though he had never regarded his daughter as anything but a "fine mare at stud," shed a tear or two as he said good-bye, while Glafira's mother, a little frightened old woman who lived in a state of chronic scare, bade her farewell as though her daughter were being driven to the cemetery. And perhaps the old lady was not altogether wrong. One glance at Klim's hard, heavy features or his mother's sharp, stony countenance was enough to give assurance that the young bride's existence would be tedious and dreary.

Glafira drove with her husband and mother-in-law into the town where the Dikoys lived and along Kladbischenskaya just as someone was being buried and the bells were ringing as though they were muffled with unshed tears.

According to local superstition, however, it

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was a good omen to meet a corpse, so the funeral procession did not disturb Glafira. She was much more depressed by the sight of the market square and the dreary little town, dirty and bare, with never a patch of green, while its grey dust was saturated with the smell of fish, tar, leather, oil and petroleum.

But when she saw Petenka and heard his queer bleating, Glafira was so frightened that something in her bosom seemed to crack.

Zakhar, who had come out to meet them, must have guessed the kind of impression the town and the house would make on his sister-in-law, for he was effusively friendly to her, and as soon as he had greeted her he said in a tone of kind, warm encouragement:

“Don’t be unhappy, little Sister, even here we have our joys.”

CHAPTER III

BUT, indeed, there was no joy in their lives.

"We don't get on worse than other folk," Anna Petrovna used to observe with pride, and she was perfectly right, for everybody else in the little town stagnated in just the same way.

The town was the centre of the district, a hundred and fifty versts from the capital of the province and about thirty from the railway. Its inhabitants were government officials, merchants and small shopkeepers, and a regiment of dragoons was quartered there. There was a school for boys and a high school for girls, a district school, courthouses, a branch of the Volga-Komsk bank, a steam-mill belonging to the Vinogradoffs, a prison, and ten stone churches, including the famous Cathedral, which contains an Ikon of the miraculous Mother of God.

In the centre of the town in the market-

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place were the so-called Rows, long, low buildings with green iron roofs, divided into dark cellarous rooms, offices for manufactured goods, leather, petroleum, nails, scythes, powder, grain, buttons, trimmings and fancy ware. In the middle of the square stood a strange structure, consisting only of a roof supported by wooden posts. This had an ambiguous name which well-bred young women were careful not to pronounce too often—Shopa: * and beneath this roof were the booths of the small traders.

Further there was a club with quite a tolerable library, a boulevard which the young women students and officers used as a promenade and in the Public Gardens there were a rotunda and a summer buffet. The Club organised dances and amateur theatricals, but these were patronised only by the young people. Their elders preferred cards and vodka, while the books in the library were borrowed only by the young women and the Jewish adolescents.

* Shopa is a Polish word, the meaning of which is the same as the Grecian "pygos."

In the town people were born and married and they died: merchants bought and sold, government officials scribbled at their desks, the humble folk traded in cattle and busied themselves with a thousand small occupations. Everybody seemed to live their own particular life, but in fact they all lived as the accumulated product of the villages, hamlets and farms which lay scattered round the town in the endless expanse of the steppe, along the hillsides, and between the marshes and the forests which constituted the vast district and its eleven sub-districts.

These hamlets and villages were inhabited by a strange semi-barbarous people who believed implicitly in signs and portents. Their faces were covered with hair, and in summer and winter alike they wore thick warm caps, and they were dirty and dark like the earth, their mother. They were called Peasants.

Somewhere in the large cities were men and women who talked and wrote of these Peasants, contriving many and various methods of working their salvation. They called them

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“God-bearers” and believed them to contain secreted some great and holy truths. These enthusiasts called upon the world to learn truth and wisdom from the Peasants. Great political parties gathered round the word Peasant, and the marvellous word produced events of great importance, while cultured young men and women in love with sacrifice embarked upon murder, risking prison and the rope for the sake of the blessed word.

Meanwhile the Peasants went on starving, dying of all kinds of diseases, propagating their species with incredible rapidity, ploughing the clay and the sand, clearing forests, draining marshes, baking in the sun, freezing in the snow and—paying taxes.

When a Peasant came to town he was timid, bashful and suspicious as a savage. He bowed humbly to every man who wore a uniform or carried a watch, and would stand for hours with bared head in frost or heat in front of the magistrate’s offices. But on Fair-days the Peasants poured into the town in droves, with horse and waggon, wives and children and

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dogs, and the streets resounded with the creaking of wheels, the neighing of horses, the squealing of babies, drunken brawls, coarse oaths and lecherous songs. They would outspan in the market square, tilt their waggons, and drape ragged tents round them—and it would seem as though the town had been invaded by a Tartar horde of the days of Genghis Khan.

All the inhabitants of the town existed through and for the Peasants. It was for them that the Rows had been built, for them that the official buildings had been established, for them that the churches were designed and the four-storied prison.

The traders robbed them, the priests frightened them with fearful tales of hell, the officers and soldiers suppressed their blind crazy rebellions that broke out now and then through their hunger, or their ignorance, or their faith in strange legends of a Golden Rule that promised them land and freedom.

The young people of the town stopped reading books as soon as they grew up and drifted

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into the places of the greedy tradespeople and the venial government servants. The young women married officials enriched from the State treasury, while as soon as the young men completed their education they donned caps and badges, and in their turn became government officials. This had been the history of the town from generation to generation and it seemed as though it would go on for ever and ever.

The whole town lived on graft and swindling, and when it chanced that a living soul with a sensitive conscience and a feeling heart came into the midst of it all, it would slowly be degraded, dulled, besmirched, under the influence of the prevailing greed, sloth and boredom. Money, food, sleep, cards, gossip, hypocrisy and drunkenness were the common-places of the life of the town, with brawling and murder as variations. It would have struck the townspeople as queer even to think that it might be different.

And this was the life the Dikoys lived.

In their wide courtyard somebody was

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always being swindled, given short measure or change. The Peasant who dealt there would come out bewildered, sweating and haggard, asking with a foolish perplexed expression: "How can that be?" Then he would mutter to himself and stare idiotically at the ground and at last in utter perplexity go crashing off into the nearest inn. In the house, however, profits were amassed and like respectable people the Dikoys ate and slept in their beds and begat worthy offspring.

From an early hour in the morning Klim Ivanovich bustled about the house and court-yard all day long, cursing and calling on the name of God as he bargained with his customers. Anna Petrovna shrilled and screamed at the servants ceaselessly, and Zakhar worked at the oil-mill. At tea or supper, when they gathered round the table they talked only of profit and loss and accused each other of idleness or dissipation. Their distractions consisted of a complete sullen idleness on holidays, standing through interminable church services until they were stupefied; aimless gossip,

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satisfying their animal desires, and unrestrained drunkenness for birthdays, weddings, and funerals.

Glafira soon grew accustomed to this existence. An outsider might even have thought her perfectly happy. At least her lovely face wore a mask of impenetrable tranquillity as in rich attire she walked to church with her husband on a feast day, or presided in the parlour, waiting on her guests with candy-cakes, nuts and home-made sweets, all with a gentle dignity.

In the two years of her marriage her figure had matured and she had acquired a peculiarly charming gravity of manner and a sweet melodious way of speaking. Indeed she gained in beauty every day, but strangely her smile no longer roused a thirst for the kiss of her lips.

Glafira was as much afraid of her husband as before but she had grown used to him and to his heavy wearisome caresses, which she accepted now without repulsion, idly, indifferently, like a well-fed cow.

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Klim Ivanovich paid hardly any attention to her and only at night vented his savage insatiable lust upon her. Anna Petrovna did not like her and wore her down with scolding, especially after her old father, now completely ruined, began to come to his son-in-law for money. The old man was dirty and unkempt, obviously drunk, and he had made his approaches timidly and cravenly. He was given nothing, but Glafira was forced to endure her mother-in-law's reproaches while her husband taunted her with continual reminders that he had rescued her from a poverty-stricken house:

"You had nothing like this in your dear little father's house. . . . When you lived with your dear Papa you had to wear working clothes. . . . And see what a lady you have become!"

Zakhar treated Glafira kindly. He pitied her openly and often defended her against Mother's attacks. Petenka, the idiot, adored her like a dog because she was kind to him and beautiful.

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But Zakhar was rarely at home, spending most of his time at the farm or hunting or with women. And Petenka could only give his inarticulate bleat, so that by the end of the second year of her marriage Glafira had begun to languish. At first her dejection had no definite cause and it was expressed only in an aimless irritability, which, however, needed but an untoward event to turn it into another emotion.

This happened when Zakhar had an accident at the mill when a broken cog from a wheel struck him on the forehead. The wound was slight, but for some reason it turned septic and had to be washed and bandaged every day, and Glafira undertook to see to it.

Zakhar would sit down on a chair, and she would stand by him, with a wad of cotton in a bowl of water, and carefully bathe the wound, detaching the lint from the flesh thread by thread. It was a painful proceeding, but Zakhar would sit patiently pretending that it did not hurt at all. He would laugh and jest, trying to be pleasant, and he would say:

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"What a light hand you have, little Sister. You ought to become a doctor."

Glafira would blush with pleasure, and holding her breath, she would try to be even more gentle.

Once by accident she pressed Zakhar's head against the soft, warm cushion of her breast.

It was a mere flash of contact and Glafira instinctively moved away at once, but somehow both were stirred and embarrassed. All that evening Glafira was silent and absent-minded, and Zakhar kept on stealing glances at her as though he were seeing her for the first time as she should be seen. They hardly analysed their feelings, and yet each knew that this chance contact had first made him feel the woman in her and her in him the man.

From that evening on Zakhar began to watch Glafira with a male intentness, her lovely shoulders, her firm breasts, and supple limbs and fresh lips, while she was filled with a thrilling tenderness for her brother-in-law. The daily changing of the bandage brought them ever closer, and both waited for the same

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thing. Zakhar yearned for Glafira to touch him, while she could hardly restrain herself from pressing his head to her breast, until at last it came about almost against their will. Then they both sank into a strange, sweet forgetfulness, Zakhar never stirring, Glafira burning red with eyes half-closed as though she were just waking from sleep, as she moved the lint across his wound. The water trickled through Zakhar's hair down into his collar, but they did not notice it, and it was only after a long time that they could turn away from each other.

After a week the wound was healed. The bandaging had ended, and their relationship sank back into its old routine. But only outwardly.

Zakhar had always liked the beautiful Glafira, but it had never entered his mind to look upon her as a woman. Glafira was his own brother's wife, and Zakhar would have thought it a deadly sin to feel amorously towards her. He tried to forget the strange excitement he had felt when she bandaged his wound, and

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he seemed to have succeeded, for he went back to his pursuit of the gay daughters of the shopkeepers, and as before he went hunting and stayed on the farm, and spent most of his time at the oil-mill which he had built not far from home on one of the many empty plots on Kladbischenskaya.

But Glafira, it seemed, had experienced something deeper, for, after this, she had a craving for Zakhar's company, felt lonely when he stayed away from home for any length of time, and under some sort of pretext she went to the mill every day.

Here Zakhar was supreme. He worked like a beast of burden, starting up the great wooden wheel that was turned by a horse, helping the workmen with a handle of the hydraulic press, jesting and laughing all the time. His shirt was open at the neck, his sleeves were rolled up above the elbow, and Glafira, unnoticed, would watch the play of his strong muscles under his sunburned skin, while her eyes would grow darker and her cheeks would glow.

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“Well, little Sister? Come to help us?”
Zakhar would ask playfully.

Glafira would blush, laugh and go away. But at night when her husband became too insistent she would repulse him irritably.

“Leave me alone. . . . I’m sick of you. . . . I want to sleep. . . .”

Something strange had happened within her, but she did not admit it to herself—not until jealousy set in.

One day she saw Zakhar playfully put his arm round one of the girls who worked in the mill. The girl was pretty, robust and impudent. She gave Zakhar a blow on the chest and pushed him away and her white teeth flashed provokingly and temptingly.

“Just see how nice she is . . .” said Zakhar, half closing his eyelids.

The girl laughed, but Glafira was silent and went away and she never answered Zakhar’s playful questions all day.

From that moment on she knew that she loved Zakhar, and she was madly jealous of all women. When Zakhar visited a house where

there were young girls, Glafira had not a moment's peace: and at the thought of his marrying her head spun in a whirl. She wanted to prove to Zakhar that she was more beautiful and interesting than any of the girls he met. She tried to show herself before him half dressed,—she had a burning desire for him to see her nude, and as she knew this in herself her whole face would flame and her heart contract with shame, while her body would languish in a riot of desire, with her knees trembling in the frailness of bliss.

Not for anything in the world would she have betrayed her emotions to anyone, for she thought them sinful. When her longing for Zakhar grew to an anguish she would try to forget it in her husband's arms—but afterwards she knew nothing but weariness, mortification and physical repulsion for Klim Ivavich.

CHAPTER IV

ONCE during the night a big fire broke out three houses away from the Dikoys' yard. Solodovnikoff's hemp-barns were alight. The dense black sky was draped with a red flickering veil and the neighbouring bell-tower was flooded from top to bottom with saffron light. High above the fire pink doves hovered in the sky and floundered helplessly in the purple smoke which oozed up in dense clouds. The alarm bells rang out from all the churches sharp and clear in their insistence. From the Dikoys' yard the noise of the fire engine could be clearly heard rattling and clanking, together with the hiss of a bursting hose, the barking of dogs, and the eager shouts of excited voices. Every now and then the roof timbers broke with a deafening crash and then a fiery column shot up scattering millions of sparks in every direction, terrific in their brilliance against the

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dark sky. It was like daylight in the yard and in the orchard the twisting burning flocks of hemp came slowly fluttering down. All the workmen and Klim Ivanovich stood with pails of water on the roofs of the barns, extinguishing the firebrands as they fell, while Mother stood tall and still on the steps. She was all in black with a glimmering pink reflection on her pale face, and she held a black Ikon in her withered bony hands.

Over the whole scene there was that sinister yet exuberant spirit which takes possession of a crowd watching a fire at night, as though some magic spell were abroad suddenly to change everything and to bring a new significance and beauty.

Glafira was asleep when the first cries reached the yard.

“Fire! Fire! . . . We’re on fire!”

She threw a large shawl round her shoulders and ran out onto the steps in the yard.

The night was warm and sultry, and the nearness of the blaze intensified the heat. Glafira stood in the doorway behind Mother

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anxiously listening to the noise of the fire and the hubbub. The bells went on ringing, now near, now further away, and it looked as though the flames were spreading. From the steps silhouetted against the crimson background the black figures of Klim Ivanovich and the workmen stood out: they were gesticulating to each other and continually stooping to pour water on the falling sparks. The sky behind the roof was brilliantly lit up, and this made the space between the barns seem even more black and ominous. Only the rattling chain of the dog straining in terror sounded in the darkness.

Pulling her shawl closer round her naked shoulders, Glafira stood there, weirdly beautiful and transfigured in the red glare of the flames. Zakhar, who had been to the fire, came running back to see that they were all right. He was black with soot and smoke, but gay and cheerful. He caught sight of Glafira and stared at her in astonishment.

“Well, little Sister!” he called out merrily.
“See how it blazes! not afraid, are you?”

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Glafira made no reply, and went on staring fixedly at the fire, the reflection of which was kindling glimmering sparks in her black eyes.

Zakhar climbed up the steps to watch and stood by her side.

“You’re not afraid?” he repeated.

Glafira slowly turned and looked straight into his eyes, and in her long silent stare there was something that threw Zakhar into confusion.

“Why do you look at me like that?” He cut short his question, and his voice trembled a little. Glafira however, turned in silence and slowly vanished in the darkness of the hall.

Zakhar remained standing on the steps and suddenly he forgot the fire, his Mother and everything else in the world. A sudden mad thought darted through his brain and with a wrench uprooted all his feelings. Everything that until now had seemed monstrous suddenly appeared as possible and palpably near. It was all so weird—the night, the fire, the crackling of the flames, the ringing of the church bells in alarm, the darkness and the glare, and

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above all, the strange new expression on Glafira's face. On such a night as this everything was possible and nothing was terrible.

He was still hesitating when his Mother said in a severe, scolding tone:

"There's nothing to stare at. . . . It isn't a holiday! . . . Why doesn't someone light the Holy Lamp? . . . Glafira! Glafira!"

Glafira did not answer. She stood in the dark hall where she could see the steps and Zakhar's tall figure lit up by the blaze. She heard her mother-in-law call, but she was overcome with a strange weakness and could not answer. A mysterious unrecognised power was at work in her. What she was waiting for Glafira did not know herself, but if Zakhar had called her just then she would have gone to him, ready for everything, with head erect, without shame, or fear, and at all costs. And if anyone had tried to stop her she might have killed him but she would have gone on just the same.

"Glafira!" Mother called again. "What's the matter with her? Has she gone deaf? . . .

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Go and tell her to light the Holy Lamp in front of the Ikon, Zakhar!"

Zakhar turned obediently and stepped into the darkness. He felt as though his legs must give way. He did not know where Glafira was, but as soon as the stifling damp air of the house closed round him he knew at once that she was very near, waiting for him.

Glafira stood in the dark hall and against the lighted square of the doorway saw Zakhar coming straight towards her. But she did not move from where she stood and he had hardly taken five steps when he ran into her with the full impact of his body. He knew only too well who was standing against him, but for some reason or other he uttered a low hysterical whisper:

"Who is there?"

Glafira neither spoke nor stirred. Zakhar put out his hand and in the darkness touched something cool and smooth and delicate like the petal of a flower. His senses swam and unable to restrain himself any longer he tried to put his arm round her. Glafira slipped

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away into the darkness and vanished, but her hot breath brushed his neck and cheek with a dry flame. Zakhar could not have told whether she had kissed him or not. For some time he stood transfixed. Then he turned and walked slowly out onto the steps. His knees were trembling and his brow was wet.

Outside he met Klim Ivanovich coming up the stairs heavily, growling:

“I’m sure they set fire to it. I know these damned Peasants!”

It was much darker already in the yard. The ringing of the bells had ceased and the saffron bell-tower had faded into grey. Behind the black barns the crowd was still agog and excited and the crackling of the fire could still be heard. But there were no longer any dancing sparks, and there was nothing more for the men on the roofs to do. They climbed down one after another, jumping heavily into the darkness and gaily chaffing each other.

Klim Ivanovich stopped for a moment, looked at Zakhar and said, not without a touch of malice:

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“A heavy loss for Solodovnikoff. What has not been burned is ruined.”

Zakhar did not reply. The sight of his brother and the sound of his voice roused in him a deep and cowardly shame. He suddenly came to his senses and realised with horror what he had been on the brink of doing. His feeling was so intense that it drained away every drop of blood from his face. He walked quickly down the steps and went away from the house into the empty darkness of the yard.

“So that’s it! . . . That’s how it is!” kept ringing in his head: but in the tips of his fingers, spreading right through the whole of his body, was still the lingering sensation of something cool, smooth and delicate like the petal of a flower. He heard Klim Ivanovich’s voice calling Glafira in the distance and he suddenly conceived such a hatred for his brother that his heart throbbed.

The fire had died down entirely and everything all round was as dark as the heart of the forest at night. The glass shutters of the

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verandah still showed a reddish glow, and the windows of the house were feebly lighted. The little lamps in front of the Ikons had been lit. Zakhar stood near the unlit barn, looking at the house, and he did not know what to do.

At last he realised clearly that he was on the verge of committing a deadly sin, for which there was forgiveness on earth but not in Heaven. But though he knew this he was tormented by an intolerable passionate desire that became an increasing torture.

He had a feeling that it did not matter what happened now, and that sooner or later this thing must be. But mingled with his burning sense of guilt there surged in him so fierce an impatience of desire that it turned into a bewildering hatred of Glafira.

So brooding Zakhar paced up and down the yard, sometimes going out into the square, which seemed wider and emptier than ever in the faint glimmer of the dawn. For a long time he stood bareheaded on the mound and watched the sky grow pale and the white

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houses of the town loom slowly out of the darkness.

He did not go to bed until behind the dark roofs spread a wide band of morning red and the first peasant women came trotting up the main street with baskets and milk cans on their way to market.

Nor did Glafira sleep. She lay beside her husband who snored and often stirred in his slumber, staring with wide strained eyes into the darkness. The huge, sweaty, sticky body of the man smelled oppressively of stale linen. Glafira suffered from the heat. She pressed herself against the cold hard wall and fastidiously avoided touching her husband. Zakhar's face was always before her, and on her shoulders and her breast she could feel the touch of his hands. When she remembered how she had deliberately flung open her shawl, Glafira closed her eyes in shame. But at the same time she wanted the memory of it to last forever. Her whole body burned and ached for him, and writhed shamelessly and voluptuously in the

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hot bed, urged on by her sweet guilty thoughts. And then she suddenly remembered what a terrible sin it was, and she shrank together.

But like Zakhar, she also knew that for some reason it was inevitable and that to fight against it would be in vain.

CHAPTER V

NEXT day Klim Ivanovich did not drive off as usual but stayed at home to look over the accounts. When Glafira saw this she was thrown into consternation, and this forced her to recognise her unavowed hope.

“God Almighty! What am I thinking of?” And she fought against it in desperation.

It was mid-July and the roofs of the houses glowed and glittered in the intolerable sun while the sky was a depressing opaque blue. A few ruffled chickens squatted under the hedges, never moving from their shade. The dog chained in the yard lay panting with his tongue hanging and dripping saliva by his kennel. And even the dry dusty steppe grass drooped and seemed to wither in the terrific heat. Sennoy Square was as quiet as the grave and exhaled a quivering cloud of vapour, while

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the little white houses across the way gleamed like white hot irons searing the eyes.

Klim Ivanovich sat red and perspiring in his vest, clicking the bones in his reckoner, almost covering them with his fat moist fingers. Anna Petrovna made never a sound and a dead silence reigned over the whole house, broken only by the buzzing of millions of sticky black flies.

Zakhar never left his room all day long, for it was cooler there because his windows looked out on the verandah. He did not see Glafira nor did he know where she was, but the invisible tie between them held firm. Zakhar tried to work, but he could think of nothing but Glafira, his whole being maddeningly aware of her presence in the house.

Nothing was changed. The same old furniture, the objects to which he had been accustomed all his life, surrounded him, but he was overwhelmed with shame like a thief waiting for his opportunity, feeling as though everybody in the house knew what he was thinking, and longing and waiting for.

The fact that Klim Ivanovich was at home

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to prevent Glafira coming to him reassured Zakhar and at the same time maddened him, while Glafira was consumed with a fever of impatience. She wandered through the house like a lost soul from bedroom to kitchen, and kitchen to the steps, staring dismally at the dusty blue sky and the empty yard, then tried to busy herself with her domestic duties, giving orders to the cook, but one thought only hammered incessantly in her brain: Zakhar was waiting for her, Zakhar was waiting.

Why she wanted to go to Zakhar she did not know. The impulse was stronger than herself and like an unswerving doom.

Unconsciously wrestling with herself, Glafira tried to find some fresh occupation, but her needlework dropped from her hands. At last in desperation she went to her mother-in-law and asked if she might go into the town to buy some thread.

"Wait until after dinner and we'll go together," said Mother.

And Glafira resigned herself to her fate. She went into the corridor, stealthily listened

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to the clatter of the counters in the room where Klim Ivanovich was working, and stole like a mouse into Zakhar's room.

As she passed her bedroom door she saw her husband bending over his reckoner, and it seemed to her that Klim Ivanovich turned and looked round—but this did not stop her.

Zakhar was sitting at the table. He did not rise when he saw Glafira, nor did he say anything. But his face grew paler. For one moment Glafira stopped on the threshold with her hand on the lintel, and her head thrown back, watching intently for any sign of life in the corridor behind her. Then she tore herself away from the door and slowly, as though it were against her will, went up to Zakhar and remained standing in front of him with bowed head and hanging arms. She stood beside him without looking up, and only after Zakhar had taken her hand did she meet his gaze piteously in a brief moment of sorrow. A helpless vague smile spread across her face, her cheeks reddened and she gave a deep sighing breath. Zakhar, without rising, put his arms round her

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and drew her to him. Glafira yielded, and through her thin dress he could feel the coolness of her skin. They stayed so for a long time as though they did not know what to do next. Then Zakhar gently turned her face to face with him, took her on his knees and kissed her lips, her neck, her breasts. Her skin was slightly moist and her lips were soft and submissive. He felt her strong, regular teeth through them. She did not return his kisses, but, breathing spasmodically, she shut and opened her eyes.

A savage insane lust seized Zakhar. He forgot that Klim Ivanovich was in the next room and that someone might pass the open door at any moment. Nothing mattered to him just then; nothing else could impinge upon his mind. Glafira made no resistance when Zakhar threw her roughly on the bed. She gave herself to him silently, unresistingly. She raised her strange slanted, half-closed eyes, looked at Zakhar with a happy wondering smile and clasped her arms round his neck.

CHAPTER VI

NOTHING seemed to have changed in the house of the Dikoys. Klim Ivanovich conducted his business as before. Mother, as usual, lit the Holy Lamps and scolded the servants. Petenka, the idiot, ran after the girls as was his wont. They all worked, ate, slept, swore, and hoarded money in the same old way.

But amid all the commonplace humdrum of an existence that seemed to be established for all eternity, Glafira and Zakhar now had a life of their own, separate, secret, filled with fear and joy.

After Glafira's first surrender Zakhar was possessed by a sombre and almost brutish passion for his brother's wife. He could no longer look at her untroubled, and every movement she made, her lips, her throat, her figure, revealed by the draping of her skirt, disturbed

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him excruciatingly. All day long he thought of only one thing: how to be alone with her. He was like a man possessed. The consciousness of the deadliness of their sin gathered like a cloud, and if in the midst of their frantic rapture he remembered that Glafira was his own brother's wife, the thought only served to fan the blaze of his passion.

Glafira also lived in a constant fever of excitement. She knew now all the sweetness of love and yielded to it body and soul. She grew remarkably more beautiful and burst into blossom, a radiant being, aflame with sin. Her eyes shone, her cheeks were aglow, her lips blood red.

Like Zakhar, Glafira was filled with but one desire, and as soon as there was the smallest chance she hastened to her love. They met wherever they could, in dark attics, behind the barns, in the orchard, taking their joy in short, hurried, coarsely sensuous caresses almost openly under the eyes of the work people and even of Klim Ivanovich and his mother. Often the merest chance saved them from ex-

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posure, and Glafira's heart was constantly in the grip of a paralysing dread. But the incessant danger and the impossibility of a complete satisfaction were only fuel to their passion. They spoke but little; the bond between them was purely emotional.

Glafira lived with Klim Ivanovich as before, and it never occurred to her that it could be otherwise. Her life with him exhausted and irritated her, but she never refused him, and Klim Ivanovich was without suspicion. And, as for Zakhar, he never gave a thought to it. Glafira was Klim Ivanovich's lawful wife and their relationship seemed to him the normal thing. It was only a chance occurrence that roused his dormant jealousy,—a trifling incident and one look that Glafira gave him.

On Transfiguration Day Klim Ivanovich had a guest to dinner at the house, a wealthy and important customer. As it was a feast day, they were all dressed in their best, and Glafira wore a green silk dress that made her look prettier than ever for it went well with her black eyes and hair. The meal proceeded

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ceremoniously and even solemnly; conversation was in every way polite and discreet. But towards the end the atmosphere changed. They had emptied three bottles of vodka and two of claret. Klim Ivanovich and his guest—a dried-up, clean-shaven old man in a long black coat—reddened with their liquor and at last fell into a jovial mood. Pretty Glafira stirred the old man's senses, and he looked at her with his little oily eyes and winked at Klim Ivanovich and said:

“Well, well— So you’re still a young man!”

Glafira blushed and looked modestly down, while Mother, trying to restrain their guest, said in affected annoyance:

“You should not make the young lady bashful, you old sinner!”

The old man laughed, showing his one decayed tooth, and replied:

“Come, come, little Mother. . . . Why should you make them feel bad about it? In our young days you and I were as fond of sweets as they.”

After dinner everybody went out with the

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guest, Klim Ivanovich and Zakhar taking him as far as his carriage to pay their respects, while Glafira and Mother stood on the steps, with their arms folded under thin silk shawls.

After the last words had been said the old man climbed into his smart carriage, took the reins, looked at Glafira, and said with a wink at Klim Ivanovich:

“A pretty little wife. . . . But not for my sort!” And he laughed and flicked his horse, which was plump and well-fed as became a wealthy merchant.

The barefooted stable boy who was in attendance jumped nimbly onto the carriage as it started to move, seated himself behind his master, and the carriage swung with a jerk through the open gateway. The old man sat on the box, stiff as a board and no one looking at his bony rigid back could have guessed that only a short while before he was laughing and joking. Behind him with his bare legs tucked up the stable boy bobbed up and down with every movement of the carriage.

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After their guest was out of sight they all went back into the house.

"Well, he has brought us good luck," said Mother, referring to the business that had just been concluded.

But Klim Ivanovich had something else on his mind. His face was flushed, and, obviously excited by the old man's allusions, as he passed his wife he touched her breast playfully and blinked at her.

"O! stop that!" said Glafira irritably, and she swept with an angry rustle of her silks out of the room.

"Now, she's angry!" laughed Klim Ivanovich, and turning to his brother he said with a burst of pride:

"I've a handsome young wife, eh?"

Zakhar replied mechanically with an understanding smile. He was just thinking that his drunken brother would soon go to sleep and that his mother would retire early and then Glafira would come to him! His brother's words sounded like a hint and embarrassed him.

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Zakhar's hopes, however, bore no fruit. Klim Ivanovich's playful mood seemed to persist, and when Mother and Glafira had put away the wine bottles and the cakes Zakhar sat by the window trembling with impatience, looking out at the square until Klim Ivanovich was heard calling from the bedroom:

“Glafirochka!”

The peculiarly slyly blithe tone of his voice made Glafira and Zakhar realise at once what he was calling her for, and Glafira gave Zakhar a quick furtive look of burning anger, disappointment, womanly shame, that drove the blood gushing to his head.

“Glafira!” Klim Ivanovich called a second time.

Glafira put down the plate in her hands and submissively obeyed the summons. She had to pass Zakhar, touching him with her gown, but she did not glance at him and disappeared into her room.

Mother had gone to bed and the house was suddenly filled with a desolate silence. Zakhar sat alone in his room waiting for Glafira

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to come, although he knew all the time that she would not. Hope betrayed roused a poignant rage in his breast and now a new passion invaded his soul with its fire. For the first time he realised fully that Glafira did not belong to him alone. He felt as though he could see through the walls and his inflamed imagination created brutal visions of the scene. His blood boiled and his breast was crushed beneath such a seeming weight that he could hardly breathe.

He tried to comfort himself with the thought that Glafira was not to blame, that she was his brother's lawful wife and must fulfil his lustful demands. But this did not relieve his torment because it seemed to him that the cure of the matter lay not in the exigencies of the law so much as in the fact that she herself found pleasure in her husband's arms.

This idea was so horrible that Zakhar was at the mercy of his fury and despair. He wanted to roar out, to break into the room, to tear Glafira by her hair from the bed, and

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shame her before everybody, or even to kill her.

But he dared not move, and his anguish was beyond endurance.

In the evening they drank tea in the verandah. The purple hazy sun sank slowly behind the roofs of the barns, but it was still hot and the glass shutters of the verandah seemed as though they must melt. The air was stifling. Glafira sat with a burning face while little straggling wisps of hair clung to her forehead as she poured out tea. Mother pursed up her parched thin lips and stared with vacant heavy eyes as she blew on the hot tea in her saucer. Dripping with perspiration, not altogether awake after his heavy sleep, Klim Ivanovich drank glass after glass of tea. All were silent and every now and then sighed heavily as they mopped the beads of sweat that came rolling down their foreheads.

Zakhar, stealing sharp, anguished glances at Glafira, watched her slyly, and to him she seemed calm, happy and contented. He hated

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her—he hated his brother—and now he longed to kill them both.

Glafira must have felt this in him for her hand trembled visibly and she avoided looking in his direction.

When they had finished tea the sun had already set and only a red glow shimmèred, dwindling slowly behind the roofs. Gentle shadows stole over yard and orchard, and revivifying gusts of coolness crept almost imperceptibly in their wake. Mother went indoors to look after the household and Klim Ivanovich went out on the balcony, sat down to take the fresh air, unbuttoned his waist-coat and stared dully at the ground under his feet.

Zakhar was still finishing his tea when Glafira started to clear the table. Reaching across for a saucer, she touched his hand timidly and softly as if by accident. Zakhar started and looked up at her, saw her black, slanted half-closed eyes looking up at his beseechingly and guiltily. He remembered sharply what he had lived through and jerked his hand back angrily.

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Glafira tried to say something, but Zakhar got up and walked out onto the balcony. Glafira followed him with sad startled eyes and dropped the saucer.

"There! What are you breaking now?" exclaimed Klim Ivanovich angrily.

Glafira winced, and, still as a mouse, she began to gather up the pieces.

Zakhar sat on the steps, rolled a cigarette and stared at the ground, while Klim Ivanovich began to discuss their recent guest. Zakhar did not hear what he was saying. He was listening intently with every sense alert to the sound of the footsteps and the broken crockery on the verandah. He knew perfectly well that he had hurt Glafira brutally and cruelly, but that only gave him a perverse, malicious joy.

"She deserves it," he thought.

Glafira busied herself for a long time in the verandah, and every now and then she looked at Zakhar hoping that he would return her glances. But Zakhar persistently looked the other way and pretended to see nothing.

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Twice she went into the house and came out again: and at last she collected the tea things and went in. It was very quiet in the verandah and Zakhar suddenly felt a yearning in his heart. He was sorry for Glafira and was afraid that something might happen.

But Klim Ivanovich stayed still, his big belly hanging, leaning on his arms akimbo, and slowly and with a sort of dull philosophical satisfaction he said:

“A clever old boy! . . . Must admit that. A fortune of at least half a million and he works like the commonest labourer. Think: eighty, or even older. There’s a man for you. I’ve been to his house. Even the flies pay taxes there. His sons are grey-haired already, every one of them, but they dare not sit down in his presence. No softness about him. He married his daughters to the richest men he could find. Even the Governor respects him . . . and why? Because he knows and has known all his life what he wants and has kept to his place. . . . ‘I am a merchant,’ says he. ‘And I can’t bother about any fancy notions. My

business is to increase my fortune and leave it to my children and children's children well tied-up so that it shall stay in the family. . . .' All the same he has spent a lot of money on women. He is a widower and in spite of his years is as lusty as anyone. He loves women. Well, what of it? He certainly has worked hard all his life and it's time he had a little amusement."

Zakhar started out of his reverie. Glafira's white head cloth flashed across the courtyard and disappeared behind the house. The gate leading into the street closed with a crash.

"What does a man live for?" mused Klim Ivanovich, continuing the conversation at dinner in his thoughts. "Everybody wants to have his fun and everybody meets the fate he carved out for himself. If you're on top you're all right, and if you're weak—that's your bad luck. . . . There's a deal of talk now-a-days about freedom and equality. If you want my opinion, that's all nonsense. If you live at peace with the law and stick to your business no one has any right to touch you. That fel-

low there is a workman. I am a merchant. You are, let us say, a government official, or an officer. Every one of us has his station in life. That's the only way to maintain order in the world. If everyone was at the bottom and no one at the top, what would happen? We'd have Sodom and Gomorrah. Our people are an ignorant people. Can they even think straight? Give them freedom and they'd be at each other's throats killing one another. That's all. They are savages. . . . Every child can see for himself that everybody can't be rich: there isn't so much money in the whole world. It's easy to say we don't want any more rich men, we don't want any more capital, but if everyone becomes a beggar . . . who is any better off?"

"Yes. I suppose you are right." Zakhar agreed without listening. He was wondering in anguish where Glafira could have gone.

"Now, I'll tell you something," Klim Ivavich continued more excitedly. "Everybody wants to eat and that is why everybody must work for the good of the country. If you give

a man bread for nothing, do you think he will ever work again? . . . He would not dream of it. Besides it is written that work was given to man not for his pleasure, but as a punishment, and what man will deliberately punish himself of his own free will? . . . Men need a stick to shove them along."

"Klim Ivanovich," said a workman who had come up the steps, taking off his cap. "The people are waiting. You promised them their wages today."

"Promised! Promised!" mimicked Klim Ivanovich irritably, the cheerful expression of his face changing to one of anger. "Can't I have a moment's talk in peace?"

Zakhar did not wait to hear more, but got up and went indoors. It was already dark and very quiet in the house as though it were deserted. Zakhar put on his cap, stood hesitating in the middle of the room and then suddenly ran on tiptoe down the passage and out by the back door.

Outside the gate the workmen were standing in little knots or sitting on a bench. They

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smoked, spat and every now and then swore at somebody or other. When Zakhar came out by the back door they all fell silent and followed him with their glances. When he had gone some distance one of them said softly but distinctly:

“He’s after his sweetheart.”

And they all broke into a loud laugh. It was like a herd of colts neighing.

Zakhar heard the words, but his thoughts were so full of Glafira that he did not understand their terrible meaning. Feigning indifference he strolled slowly to the middle of the square, climbed to the top of the mound and at once caught sight of Glafira.

She was crossing the river and her light head cloth shone brightly in the grey solitude. Zakhar guessed at once where she was going. Beyond the bridge was a wide green meadow, the edge of which was bathed by the river, with stout old willows growing at the water’s edge. Here Glafira and he had often met, and Glafira must have walked across the yard on purpose to make sure of his following her.

Carefully, quietly, Zakhar descended the mound, looked round once more and then followed Glafira almost at a run.

The evening mists were already hanging over the river, and it was quite cool there. Being a holiday the smithy was closed and there was no one on the bridge. Zakhar turned into the meadow.

Glafira was walking far ahead of him along a path that had been trodden deep into the thick, damp grass. Her white head cloth fluttered bright and gay above the dark green pasture.

She heard Zakhar's footsteps, but did not look round and walked straight on as though bent on some errand, and not until they were behind the willows did she turn to meet him with a pleading, piteous smile.

Zakhar looked at her red lips, her soft round shoulders, her ripe passionately vivid form and Glafira seemed more beautiful to him than ever: but her guilty smile set alight such a blind rage in him that for a time he was almost stunned.

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The expression in his eyes must have been terrible for the smile suddenly died from her lips, and she turned pale.

"Zarja! What's the matter with you? Zarja!" she stammered, raising her arms to shield herself.

And as though her gesture had decided him, Zakhar raised his fist and struck her on the head. She uttered a low moan and swayed where she stood. The white head cloth fell from her shoulders and her comb slipped from her hair into the grass. With a savage joy Zakhar struck her once more and Glafira fell to her hands and knees and burst into tears.

A feeling of horror, pity and despair seized Zakhar. In one bewildered moment he stood gazing at her as she sobbed and then he walked quickly away and stood still with his throbbing brow pressed against the cold rough bark of an old willow. A dark void filled his soul. It seemed to him that everything must be ended between them.

"Now everything is ended . . . ended!" was the one thought turning in his brain.

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But suddenly two soft warm arms came stealing round his neck from behind and Glafira's supple burning form was pressed to him tight—tight. Unable to trust his senses, Zakhar turned round: Glafira hung round his neck, looking up to him with her wide slanted black eyes wet with tears and on her lips a strange smile of exultation.

"Beat me. . . . He beat me. . . . What a man he is," she muttered deliriously.

Jealousy, fear, despair vanished suddenly. Zakhar himself did not know how it came about that a moment later they were lying in the moist tall grass that shut them off from the rest of the world with its green wall.

Afterwards they sat for a long while by the river. Glafira leaned her breast against Zakhar's knees and slipping her soft warm fingers into his she said plaintively:

"Do you think I am not tortured, too? He is so old and ugly and I do not love him. Often I would rather drown myself. But what can I do, Zarja? . . . If I refuse he will guess, and what then? . . ."

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Zakhar listened to her, gazed at the darkening orchards across the river and was silent. His excitement had gone: gloom and jealousy rankled in his breast, but his gloom was tranquil and his jealousy was dulled with weariness.

"If only he would die. . . . Eh? . . ." whispered Glafira, and she bent her head still lower so that Zakhar could not see her face.

Zakhar was repelled, but once again he was silent.

"I feel like poisoning him. God help me. . . . Really. . . . I wouldn't hesitate . . . !"

For a moment a dark exultant happiness flooded through him, but he regained his senses and a shiver ran through him. "Don't talk nonsense," he said.

"That isn't nonsense," she replied stubbornly and gloomily, bending still lower across his knees until Zakhar could feel her warm breathing.

"Well . . . and what then?" he asked after a while with an awkward smile.

Glafira dropped her head to his lap and her fingers lay still in his hand.

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"Then . . . we shall see what happens," she replied hardly audibly.

Neither spoke and for a while they sat motionless. From the depths of the meadow came a loud, shrill whistle. Glafira started, raised her head and leaped to her feet in terror.

"Jesus . . . Maria, what shall we do?"

Only now did Zakhar observe that it had grown quite dark. Far away, above the outlined roofs and churches, there still lingered a pale green strip of sunset, but the sky was already dark and faint stars began to glimmer in its depths. Clouds of mist hovered above the river and all around was a gruesome void.

Zakhar held his breath. At home they must have sat down to supper long ago and of course they must have been missed. Terror clutched both of them as they walked swiftly across the meadow, stumbling in the grass.

They could see the light in the dining room some distance away, and this could only mean that supper had begun. They walked faster and faster. Glafira almost ran. Her knees

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gave way through fear and her breath came chokingly.

Near the gate loomed a black figure coming towards them. Glafira involuntarily darted aside. She fancied she recognised Klim Ivanovich. Zakhar instinctively stepped forward with clenched fists. Next moment, however, they heard Petenka's familiar bleat. Grinning all over his face the idiot confronted them.

"What do you want?" asked Zakhar trembling.

Petenka gave vent to a few quick grunts, pointed towards the house and wrinkled his brow. He was trying to convey that Klim Ivanovich was angry. Then he pointed first to Glafira and then to himself with his fingers.

"Walkie . . . walkie . . . walkie," he grunted.

Zakhar was immensely relieved. He understood that Petenka knew everything and—to protect them—was suggesting that Glafira should say she had been for a walk with him.

"You're a fine lad, Petenka," said Zakhar. "Glasha, go with him. . . . Say that you have been out together. . . . Think of something.

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. . . I'll come later as though I had been to town."

Glafira nodded but did not move. She was still afraid.

"Go. Go. It will be all right."

Zakhar gave her a gentle push, turned round and walked quickly towards the town.

He heard the gate close and immediately afterwards the creaking of the steps.

And now for the first time he remembered the words of the workmen outside the gate earlier in the evening and he realised that not only Petenka, but all the work people and perhaps the whole town knew of his relations with Glafira. The thought of it made him shiver and he felt as though he were standing at the awful edge of a bottomless abyss.

CHAPTER VII

IN fact, everybody in the house except Mother and Klim Ivanovich knew about Zakhar and Glafira. Everybody knew but kept quiet because Klim Ivanovich was disliked and they enjoyed the injury that was being put upon him. The old people censured Zakhar and Glafira, but the young people joked about it and thought Zakhar a fine fellow.

“Why shouldn’t he? . . . He’s right. . . . Look at the pretty little wife he’s landed right under the old man’s nose. Serves the old fool right. A grizzled bridegroom and a young bride are bound for Hell.”

Klim Ivanovich began to notice that whenever the idiot Petenka stood behind him, the work girls used to giggle and hide their faces in their hands, but every time he turned round he was met only by the dull idiotic face with its expressionless eyes.

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"I'll catch you yet," he would say to Petenka, shaking his fist threateningly.

Nevertheless, he determined to find out what was going on, and on one occasion managed to catch Petenka putting his fingers to his forehead in the shape of horns.

Klim Ivanovich said nothing and pretended not to have seen. His face was gloomy, however, when he returned shortly to the house, where he met Glafira walking cheerfully and happily down the passage. He stood aside and followed her with a dour suspicious look.

At dinner he kept on glancing furtively at his wife and for the first time remarked the glorious womanhood into which she had bloomed.

"A viper. . . . A regular viper. . . ." thought Klim Ivanovich and a violent jealous rage boiled up in him.

He suddenly remembered how flirtatious and gay Glafira had been as a girl and how many admirers she had then. The terrible thought that she might have had lovers even before marriage struck Klim Ivanovich sharply and

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dazed him. And it seemed more than possible to him.

“Who can tell? . . . I was blind at the time. And the whole village are a dirty lot. Her father, for one, is a perfect blackguard.”

Klim Ivanovich remembered how quickly and gladly his proposal had been accepted. At the time he had ascribed this to his personal qualities and his money. Now however, he saw matters in a very different light.

“They were glad to cover up her lightness. . . . That’s as clear as daylight . . .” he thought, and his fat neck turned purple and the blue veins in his temples stood out.

The more he looked at Glafira the stronger grew his torturing suspicions. Klim Ivanovich had no longer any doubt that his wife had a lover, but he could not imagine who that lover might be. Zakhar never entered his head: that would have been such a sin, such a disgrace, that he could not even begin to conceive the idea.

Yet Glafira never went out alone. She was always under his own or his Mother’s eyes.

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For a moment Klim Ivanovich thought of one of the workmen, but he dismissed the idea. His wife—no matter how much she betrayed him and how much he hated her—seemed to him so beautiful that it was unthinkable that she could have thrown herself away on a dirty Peasant.

“No. She’s not that kind,” thought Klim Ivanovich bitterly.

But from that day on he knew no peace. Tortured by his wounded pride he watched his wife’s every step, followed her about, dared not sleep at night, saw sin and shame everywhere, but never spoke of it to anyone, and let no one suspect that he was jealous of his wife. But he was gloomy and distracted and ceased to worry Glafira with his attentions, and flung himself into his business with greater ardour than ever.

A heavy black cloud hung over the Dikoy household and even the girls in the kitchen felt disaster looming.

“Some tragedy is going to break,” said

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Anisya, the cook, with a sigh. "Some misfortune is bound to come, my dears."

And Matfei, the old coachman, though he did not know himself why, suddenly gave notice and asked for his wages.

Only Zakhar and Glafira had no forebodings.

After the evening when their unusual absence together had escaped detection, they lost all thought of precaution. If hitherto the initiative had always been with Zakhar while Glafira had been restrained by her paralysing fear, they now changed rôles. Glafira was like a woman possessed. She was utterly fearless, ran to Zakhar almost under her husband's eyes and one day even went so far as to kiss and embrace her lover in her mother-in-law's presence when she had turned for a moment to put a jar of jelly in the cupboard.

Zakhar sat as if turned to stone, while Glafira only laughed aloud merrily and when Mother asked: "Why are you laughing?" she replied carelessly: "Zakhar always makes me laugh."

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Mother looked at her suspiciously, but said nothing.

The old woman also was conscious of something looming in the air, and was afraid of something, but of what she could not have said.

A few days later Klim Ivanovich went away for a whole week on business and his absence was a real holiday for Glafira. She threw off all caution and restraint, and as soon as Mother had gone to sleep she stole into Zakhar's room in her bare feet, wearing nothing but her night gown, and warm and elate with expectancy, she sprang like a cat into his arms. Her passion broke all bounds, and she was insatiable in her desire. Not until dawn and only when the grey morning light crept into the house did Glafira leave him, and then Zakhar sank into a heavy sleep of weariness.

All day he was drowsy and exhausted while Glafira was happy and gay and more lovely than ever.

Somehow she forgot the possibility of her husband's return and when unexpectedly she saw his horse and carriage and the coachman

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in the courtyard, she was struck down as by a terrible sudden disaster. The thought that her heaven was over and that she must content herself with the old hasty accidental meetings was intolerable.

For a few days she bore it and suppressed her craving, but at last it drove her to a desperate plunge.

Klim Ivanovich was asleep with his head thrown back, his mouth open, his breath droning through his lips. A little Ikon lamp was burning in the room and weird shadows crept fantastically across the walls. The deep quiet night was black through the windows. Glafira suddenly raised her head and with her fever-shining eyes cast a quick glance at her husband. He muttered something in his sleep and moved his fat hand. Glafira held her breath and for a long time she remained leaning on her elbow, half-erect, never taking her eyes off him. Her heart thumped and beat irregularly and her whole body ached with a torturing impatience. A mad idea swept into her mind. A cock crowed dismally outside. Gla-

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fira acceded to her resolve. Cautiously she raised her leg above her husband's ungainly trunk, rested on one hand and her other knee, lifted herself and in a trice slid to the floor. For quite a while she remained fiercely bending over him watching his every movement, ready, it seemed, to hurl herself at him and throttle him. Then noiselessly she glided away. Klim Ivanovich did not move. In the unsteady flickering light of the Ikon lamp, wearing only her night gown, with her arms and feet bare and her black hair hanging she looked weird and awesome like a witch. Then she quickly slipped away.

A little oil lamp that had been turned down to a blue flame was smoking in the passage, the air was stuffy and close, and on a mattress on the floor lay a servant-girl, her arms stretched wide apart.

Glaflira stepped by her like a shadow, walked along the passage, past Mother's door, and disappeared into Zakhar's room. She did not even notice that the servant-girl raised her

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sleepy trowsled head as she was roused and followed her with her eyes.

"She's gone to her lover. . . . Isn't she plucky?" thought the girl enviously.

Zakhar was asleep and his room was in complete darkness. Glafira found the bed and touched his feet. Zakhar did not stir. Her hands crept over his limbs, his chest, up to his face. He started and made a restless movement.

"Who is there?" he muttered in a sleepy, hoarse voice.

Suddenly he grasped a soft bare arm.

At first he did not even understand who it was, but Glafira without a word threw back the coverlet and nestled into him. She wound her arms round him, pressed close to him, her lips sought his in the dark, and her soft web of hair spread like a net across his face. Zakhar was seized with panic.

"What are you doing, you mad woman?" he whispered.

But Glafira closed his mouth with her lips and covered his face, his neck, and his breast

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with kisses. Indeed, she was like a mad woman, afraid of nothing, thinking of nothing, lost in a wild lustful frenzy.

After that she went to him often. At first Zakhar tried to dissuade her, but he let things take their course and even waited at night for her to come to him, feeling that what must be must be.

And one night Klim Ivanovich woke up. A strange feeling of emptiness came over him. The little Ikon lamp was burning as usual, but Glafira's place was empty and had grown cold. At first Klim Ivanovich did not understand. Then all of a sudden as though someone had given him a blow he came to himself and sat straight up. He wondered whether Glafira had got up for a moment, but there was no one in the room and the open door gaped upon the dark void of the passage.

All his doubts and suspicions crowded violently in upon his brain and for the first time the unexpected awful thought that it might be Zakhar struck him. It completely robbed him of his presence of mind. Huge, ominous,

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grossly uncouth, he sat on his bed with his hairy legs hanging and he did not know what to do. The thought that had come to him was so hideous that he tried to put it away from him and to find some other explanation of Glafira's absence.

But just at that moment the darkness of the doorway was illumined and a white shadow emerged. Glafira slipped nimbly into the room. Stirred by the draught the lamp suddenly flickered up and lit up her loose dishevelled hair, her bare shoulders and slender figure clad only in a torn and crumpled night gown.

At sight of her husband Glafira stood rooted and her horror suddenly gave her completely away to Klim Ivanovich.

“A . . . h!” he cried or rather groaned and in spite of his huge bulk he sprang swiftly between Glafira and the door.

But she had no thought of running away. Paralysed with fear, her naked arms held out in self-protection, she crept slowly backwards. She never even thought of telling him a lie.

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From his wild terrifying expression she knew that lying was no use. Her only movement was a feeble effort to catch at his hands as he pushed her head and shoulders against the wall. Her black eyes, dilated with horror, stared rigidly into his.

All this was in silence. Klim Ivanovich wrenched the woman away from the wall into the middle of the room with such violence that her bare feet hardly touched the floor, and he threw her down with a heavy thud. Glafira fell on her hands and then on her side: her night gown slipped from her shoulders and the hem of it crept up to her waist, and almost naked, bruised and sore, her face hidden in her tangled hair she was pitiful to see, a wild beast at bay.

She did not defend herself, nor did she cry out, but only moaned softly as Klim Ivanovich pressed her down and began to strike her shoulders, breast, belly, with fists, knees, feet. Then he dragged her by the hair across the room, knocked her down again, beat her without a sound, panting through clenched teeth,

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possessed only by one desire, to beat her to death, at once, on the spot.

A chair fell with a crash. Glafira fell with her head against the table and it shook. The reckoner fell to the ground and the counters were scattered noisily. The servant-girl sleeping in the passage jumped up in alarm and shaking with fear clung to the wall. Mother Anna woke up and sat up in bed listening. At first she thought that burglars had broken into the house, and was about to cry for help when she heard Klim's broken grunts, Glafira's moaning and the sound of blows on a naked body. The suspicion, so long and so vaguely felt, shot through her brain like a flash of lightning and Mother Anna knew at once how matters stood. She lifted her hands in terror, hastily threw on her skirt and ran out into the passage. Meanwhile Anisya the cook had come down from the attic and was rousing the coachman and the two workmen who slept in the kitchen.

When Mother Anna rushed into the bedroom the first thing she saw was Glafira's

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head with its loose black hair thudding the floor and her naked legs kicking convulsively.

"He's killing her . . ." flashed through her mind and all her old hatred of her daughter-in-law filled her with the evil glee of revenge.

"Go on! Go on! She deserves it, the viper!"

Zakhar who, as soon as Glafira left him, had fallen into a heavy sleep, heard the noise later than the rest. At first he did not understand the meaning of it, but his Mother's shrieks told him what had happened.

Anguish and shame overcame him in such a flood that for a time he could not move, and had only one thought: to hide and pretend that the whole business was no concern of his. But just then Glafira had reached the end of her endurance: a blow on the mouth cut her lip. She felt the taste of blood and knew that she was on the point of being killed. She gave one sharp penetrating shriek.

This brought Zakhar to his senses. Without a thought of what he was doing he sprang from

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his bed and ran just as he was, in his shirt, down the corridor, pushed past his mother and rushed into the bedroom.

At the sight of Glafira lying there naked and half dead, with the blood streaming down her face, and Klim Ivanovich, half naked, savagely pounding at her, Zakhar sprang at his brother like a wild-cat. The unexpectedness of the attack made Klim Ivanovich let go of his wife, and he fell heavily to the floor, but immediately disengaged himself, and with an inarticulate roar he gripped Zakhar by the throat.

"A . . . ah! You! . . . You! . . ." he yelled, his eyes bulging out of his head.

His insane fury doubled his strength. Zakhar was younger and more active, but Klim Ivanovich dandled him like a child. Perhaps he would have throttled him if Glafira had not clutched him by the leg. Klim Ivanovich tried to wrench himself away, but she held on with all her might, and let him drag her across the room. Then he saw that she was defending her lover, and in his savage rage, he kicked her

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on the breast with his foot. Glafira moaned and swooned away.

At this moment the coachman and the workmen rushed into the room and separated the brothers.

"Klim Ivanovich, what are you doing? . . . Control yourself!" the coachman shouted breathlessly.

And Klim Ivanovich seemed suddenly to have sobered down. His strength and his fury left him simultaneously. He sank heavily into a chair and collapsed like an empty sack. His hands flopped, his head rolled from side to side, he breathed haltingly, panting and hissing, and with the dull eyes of a drunkard or a stricken man he stared straight in front of him as though he were no longer conscious of anything.

Zakhar was still trying to get at his brother, but the workmen held him tightly, while his Mother, looking like a witch with her bare scraggy shoulders and untidy wisps of grey hair, tried to scratch his face with her claw-like bony fingers, whimpering angrily:

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"Killing's too good for you! You thief! . . . What have you been doing? You scoundrel, you. . . . I'll choke you with my own hands."

Anisya the cook was screaming at the top of her voice. The workmen were yelling, while the coachman tried to hold the old woman back, saying:

"Mother Anna! Mother Anna! . . . Have you forgotten our Lord?"

Then suddenly Zakhar saw Glafira's naked body stretched motionless on the floor and he thought his brother had really killed her. He gave a wild roar and tried to free himself, but in vain. For a moment he fought like a madman, then hurling the workmen off, he ran down the passage to his own room, tore his gun from the wall and raced back with the one insane thought of killing his brother there and then.

"Jesus Maria!" shrieked the servant-girl seeing the gun, and she ran away.

Zakhar was not given time to shoot. His Mother clutched the gun, the coachman blocked

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his way, and the workmen gripped him from behind.

He was dragged out, pushed into his own room and locked in. For a long time he beat on the door with his fists and feet and shouted:

“Open! Open! Let me out. I’ll kill him anyhow. I’ll shoot him like a dog.”

Then suddenly he ceased. The workmen leaning against the door heard him totter across the room with leaden footsteps and sink heavily on to his bed.

Glafira was lifted up and put to bed. Anisya washed away the blood, bathed her face and tried to revive her. Mother Anna led Klim Ivanovich to her own room.

He obeyed her like a little child. She made him sit down on the edge of her couch, and he stayed sitting there until the morning, his head bowed to his chest, his dull eyes rivetted to the floor.

Mother Anna wept for a long time, cursing Glafira, to whom she attached all the blame, but Klim Ivanovich did not speak all night.

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Presently the house was silent: only the workmen whispered in the kitchen and Petenka, the idiot, shut up in the attic, roared like a bull with fright, until his mother screamed at him:

“Will you be quiet, you curse of God, you!”

CHAPTER VIII

THEY let Zakhar out in the morning. He was pale and would not raise his eyes.

"Do you know what you ought to do, Zakhar Ivanovich? . . . You ought to go to the farm for a little," suggested the coachman. "In fact, I have already harnessed the horses. Your Mother agrees. Otherwise something'll happen. . . . You're all so hot-blooded!"

Zakhar pondered and then agreed. It was impossible for him to stay. He dressed and slipped through the back door into the yard, and got into the waiting carriage, casting a swift look at the bedroom window. Some strangers were standing at the gate looking at him in a curious silence.

Klim Ivanovich heard the clatter of the wheels and guessed that Zakhar had driven away.

"He has gone," said Mother.

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Klim Ivanovich turned his head away and made no reply.

Glaflira did not appear all day. One of her eyes was badly hurt, her upper lip was swollen, giving her a strange and oddly capricious expression. She lay in her bed, rolled up into a ball, with her head enveloped in a large warm shawl. Her whole body ached and her arms and legs felt as though they had been racked. She no longer thought of Zakhar nor of her own disgrace. Her whole soul was filled with panic at the thought of meeting her husband. She was sure that he would kill her.

But Klim Ivanovich did not visit his wife. Mother Anna came to her once or twice. Every time Glaflira heard the old woman coming she buried her head under the bedclothes, and turned cold with fear and shame. Mother Anna looked at her with growing hatred and hissed:

“So there you are, you viper! . . . Lie there! Lie there! . . . O! So you’re hiding your monkey-face! Ashamed to look people in the face! You snake in the grass! You

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ought to be crushed! . . . You just wait!
Just you wait!"

But as soon as Mother had gone Anisya, the cook, comforted her.

"Courage, my little dove! No one is proof against temptation and sin! Just a little time, and it will be all right. If he beats you you won't die. A woman can endure a lot if she has once been happy. He won't kill you. Don't be afraid. . . . After all, you are his wife."

Klim Ivanovich appeared in the yard at the usual hour as though nothing had happened. He looked drawn and haggard and had aged much during the night, but he moved about and gave his orders as usual. The girls and workmen, who for some reason had thought they could take it easy, quickly learned their mistake, and went about their work hardly daring to look at their master, and carried out his orders with almost slavish haste. At times Klim Ivanovich caught their furtive and almost hostile glances but he affected to take no notice.

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He dined alone with his Mother, but ate very little and drank no vodka. The one bitter thought seemed utterly to occupy him. When his Mother began to curse and abuse Glafira he remained silent as though she were talking of things that were no concern of his. Only, when the old woman reported that she had learned from the servants that Glafira had been carrying on with Zakhar for a long time, Klim Ivanovich smiled bitterly and nodded. He was thinking how all that time Zakhar had looked at him in the eyes as though nothing had happened, and Glafira had been his wife.

The thought that oppressed him most was that the whole town was now talking about his shame. Then he reflected that a division of the estate between himself and his brother had now become inevitable, and that the business would suffer. Both ideas were tormenting, but Klim Ivanovich found comfort in the thought that the disgrace would be forgotten in time and that it was easy to take advantage

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of Zakhar as he knew very little about the business and was anyhow very careless.

Klim Ivanovich gave little thought to his wife. He never even thought of getting rid of Glafira or of separating from her. This was not the custom in their station of life. Glafira was his lawful wife and his lawful wife she must remain. "Whom God hath joined let no man put asunder. . . ." True, his wife had dishonoured him, and when he pictured her with Zakhar his mind began to reel. But he knew exactly what to do with her. He must give her a severe lesson, inflict punishment, knock every sinful thought out of her head once and for all.

At dusk a workman came from the mill and bashfully reported that the labourers were waiting for their wages.

"As Zakhar Ivanovich left no instructions, I don't know."

Klim Ivanovich turned his back on him, said nothing for a time, then took his cap and walked slowly across the yard. The workman hurried after him with his cap in his hand.

Mother Anna had gone to evening Mass some time ago, and the whole house was as quiet as though no one had ever lived in it. Glafira got up, wrapped herself in a big shawl and walked silently down the steps and into the orchard. She slipped along like a shadow, looking nervously about, listening to every little sound, and when she was sure that no one was watching her, she sat down on the steps gazing up at the evening sky in a reverie.

There was no one about and the great yard with its untidy wilderness of grass stretched before her as desolate as a graveyard. Now and then she could hear the dog at the back of the barn rattling his chain, and somewhere in the shed the last crow of a rooster settling down for the night. The old willow tree gently swayed its long branches and far away the sunset slowly faded behind the roofs and churches.

It was hard to say of what Glafira was thinking. Fragmentary thoughts melted into visions. All that she had lived through, her wild sinful love, passionate ecstasies, inextin-

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guishable shame, and that last night of terror seemed to slide away from her, to grow fainter and fainter like a dream. She did not think of what was to come. She did not care. She knew that she would be beaten and tortured, but the knowledge only stirred a dull, dreary melancholy in her.

Someone crossed the courtyard and came into the orchard. Glafira heard footsteps, started, made a move to rise, but, recognising Petenka, stayed where she was. He was perhaps the only person now before whom she was neither ashamed nor afraid. She knew that he would not strike her nor insult her nor laugh at her.

The idiot stood still hesitating and looked at Glafira from a distance. It was hard to say whether he gazed in alarm or compassion, but there was something very human and understanding in his dull little eyes.

Glafira smiled at him faintly and sadly. All at once the idiot came to life and he bleated and babbled forth a number of incomprehen-

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sible sounds, while he gesticulated frantically and nodded his head emphatically.

"What do you want, Petenka?" asked Glafira kindly, although the sound of her own voice gave her a dreadful throbbing in her bruised temple.

The idiot went up to her, raised his arm and put his dirty finger to her cut lip. His eyes unmistakably expressed a genuinely human pity and anger, but Glafira felt ashamed of her own unsightliness and covered herself with her shawl. Petenka grunted again, gave two little steps backward, made a gesture as though he were aiming at someone with a gun and in a sharp shrill voice like a parrot cried:

"Pha!"

Glafira thought he was trying to say that Zakhar would shoot Klim Ivanovich for having beaten her and cold shivers ran down her back. Only now did she begin to understand what a fearful calamity she had brought on the family and how it might all end. Her soul seemed suddenly to awake. Glafira

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thought of Zakhar, and her heart throbbed with fear for him, her lover.

"Petenka! Petenka!" she stammered, clutching the idiot's sleeve. "What are you saying? May the Lord save me from such harm! O, Petenka, I implore you, put that out of your head. . . . Such a sin! Tell Zakhar Ivanovich that I beg him for Christ's sake not to think of such a thing."

But the idiot shook his head obstinately and repeated the strange sharp sound:

"Pha!"

Glafira tried to say something else, but just then the little gate banged and Klim Ivanovich's voice was heard in the yard. She turned pale, jumped up and with a bound disappeared indoors. Klim Ivanovich had already reached the kitchen. Like a mouse Glafira crept into her room, threw herself on the bed, hid her face under her shawl and lay numbed and shrunken. The blood throbbed in her temples unsteadily and painfully.

Klim Ivanovich had returned morose and determined. At the mill, which had always

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been in Zakhar's hands so that Klim Ivanovich had never paid much attention to it, work was going on as usual. But it seemed to him now that everything was badly neglected, and he foresaw heavy losses.

"Of course," Klim Ivanovich smiled grimly. "That is understandable. He had no time for business."

This idea increased his hatred of his wife and fanned into flame the desire to give her a lesson which would last her the rest of her life. Moment by moment a sombre sensual excitement gathered force in him. As he passed through the kitchen he noticed a pair of reins which the coachman had left behind. He took them down from the hook where they were hanging, and threw them into the passage behind the door.

Anisya, the cook, saw him, but made no remark.

Klim Ivanovich went into the living room like a thunder cloud, and sat by the window waiting for his supper, looking out at the dreary square. The Military Band was play-

ing in the public gardens, and in the distance the music sounded marvellously lovely and soothing, but Klim Ivanovich paid no heed to it. He decided to settle accounts with his wife immediately after supper and the idea calmed him somewhat.

Soon after Mother Anna came home and it was obvious that she had been to evening Mass for her clothes smelled of candles and incense. As she went down the passage the old woman saw the reins on the floor and her face took on a queer bestial expression.

They sat at table and Klim Ivanovich ate heavily, but with no sign of haste. His mind was made up and there was no hurry now. He never thought for a moment that Glafira might run away or hide herself.

After he had finished eating he pushed his plate back, wiped his moustache, stretched himself, made the sign of the cross before the Ikon and went in to his wife. But he forgot to take the reins with him. Mother Anna snatched them up from the floor and hurried

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after him. The old woman could no longer control herself and she hissed:

“Don’t spare her! Make the viper remember it to her dying day!”

Klim Ivanovich made no answer and opened the bedroom door.

Mother Anna returned to the dining room, poured out a cup of milk, which she liked to drink with sugar after supper, and she sat down by the table impatient and expectant. Her saintly face still wore its strained, greedy expression, and her thin parchment-like ears were pricked to listen to any sound that might come from the bedroom.

The cook and the scullery maid who were washing up in the kitchen also waited and listened.

“O! Auntie, I shall run away. . . . I’m frightened, Auntie!” stuttered the girl, trembling with excitement and curiosity. “What if he beats her to death?”

“Nonsense! He won’t kill her!” replied the cook tartly.

The coachman came in.

"He's gone in to give her a thrashing," said the cook ominously.

The coachman shook his head disapprovingly, but said nothing, took his coat down from its hook, and went into the stable to pass the night there.

The day before things had been different. Death and crime lurked in the air, but today things would go as such things must.

"She cannot expect him to make a fuss of her after such goings on . . ." the old coachman said to himself reassuringly.

In the bedroom the lamp was burning on the chest of drawers. Glafira was still lying in the same position her face covered with her shawl. She did not move when her husband entered: did not even seem to hear him. But no sooner did Klim Ivanovich look at her than suddenly she threw over her shawl and bedclothes, sprang up, and stood still, with her arms hanging, staring at her husband with enormous frightened eyes that showed blacker than night against the dead-white of her face.

Klim Ivanovich gave her a quick sidelong

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glance, turned round, laid the reins on the table, and began slowly to undress. He took off his coat, hung it neatly on its hook, unbuttoned his waistcoat, the more freely to move, took the reins in his left hand and walked up to his wife. She stared fixedly at him with her eyes dilated and looked him straight in the face. She was as white as a sheet.

“Now then!” said Klim Ivanovich.

Glafira winced and cast down her eyes. Klim Ivanovich gazed at her for a long time as though the sight of her pleased him, and the gleam in his eyes grew more and more evil.

Glafira waited and she dared hardly breathe. Her knees gave way, and her hands trembled. For a long time all was silent, and then suddenly a terrific cutting blow across her cheek nearly threw her down. Glafira staggered, but kept her feet. Again and then a third time Klim Ivanovich struck her—still on the cheek. Glafira clung to the bedpost for a moment, but her strength left her, and she sank to the floor. Klim Ivanovich carefully transferred the reins from his left hand to his right,

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wound her hair methodically round his fist, and wrenched her away from the bed to the middle of the floor.

Glafira offered no resistance and crawled submissively on hands and knees, straining her neck and shoulders so as not to fall.

In the middle of the room he set her in front of him, within comfortable reach, and began to thrash her.

He thrashed her fastidiously, with all his heart and soul, now along the back, now across it, choosing the most sensitive spots. After each stripe he dragged the woman by her hair back into the same position. Glafira surrendered completely. She did not defend herself nor scream, but only winced while her legs twitched spasmodically on the floor from pain. She seemed even to be trying to make it easier for him to thrash her. Soon all the buttons were torn from her, and her blouse wrinkled up to her neck, displaying her soft plump back which was white and scarlet all over in swelling weals. Here and there were red drops of blood. The sight maddened Klim Ivanovich.

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The blood rushed to his head. His blows now rained down on Glafira with a ferocious rapidity—on her back, her legs, wherever they happened to fall. Glafira lost all control, and lashed out, trying to break loose, or at least to defend herself with her hands, but her resistance only excited him the more. An insane fury gripped him. He was no longer conscious of what he was doing, and he was beyond thought—in a frenzy he beat, beat, beat. Sometimes he dragged her by the hair and thrust her with his knees into the position he desired. For a long time nothing could be heard but his hot breathing, the swish of his blows, the dull slap as the leather struck her, and the movements of their heavy bodies on the floor. But when her blood began to splash the floor, Glafira wrenched herself away, tried to jump up, and at last gave shriek after shriek. Half mad, she threw herself about, writhed, collapsed, clutched Klim Ivanovich by his hands and feet, tried to catch the reins, even attempted to kiss her tormentor's boots—but all in vain.

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At last her shrieks swelled into one wild sustained howl that suddenly broke off short. Klim Ivanovich let her hair go, and with a kick of his knee flung her from him. Glafira fell, turned on her face and lay still. A feeble tremor ran through her whole body, and her legs twitched convulsively.

Klim Ivanovich breathed hoarsely and hollowly like a short-winded horse. His face was purple and brutish.

Without looking at his wife he stepped to the washstand, wiped his face and neck with a towel, drank a glass of water, and finally gained a partial control of himself. Then he sat on the bed and began to pull off his boots.

Glafira was still lying with her face down, one hand to the back of her head, and the other twitching queerly up and down her body: it moved restlessly as though to touch one or other of her wounds, but it always fell back impotently. She was trembling all over and sobbing as though she were choked.

At last Klim Ivanovich had removed his

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boots and lay down undressed. For a moment he was silent. Then he said:

“That’s all right. Now you’ll know better. Blow out the lamp, we shan’t need it.”

Glafira made no reply.

“D’ye hear? Come to bed.”

Klim Ivanovich roared loudly and raised his fist menacingly.

Glafira started, raised herself on her hands, fell back again, but at last managed to stand up, her whole body trembling and swaying. Her face was swollen, wet with tears and her matted hair stuck to her cheeks. Her eyes wandered wildly as though they could see nothing.

“Get undressed!” commanded Klim Ivanovich.

Glafira gave him a terrified look and began hastily to undress, helplessly, with trembling fingers, tugging at the strings of her skirt. Klim Ivanovich looked stealthily at her and his face took on an expression of barbarous, almost voluptuous satisfaction. When she had stripped to her chemise, and was standing not

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knowing what to do next, he threw back the coverlet and said:

“Well. . . . Blow out the lamp.”

Glafira bent over the lamp-glass, but her swollen lips would not obey her. The flame flared up, flickered, but did not go out.

“How long will it take you?” Klim Ivanovich growled furiously.

She gathered all her strength together and blew desperately. The lamp flared up and then went out. The darkness seemed impenetrable, and the fumes of the oil spread a stifling odour.

Klim Ivanovich lay still and waited. There was a long silence, then the sound of bare feet shuffling: a groping hand feeling for the bed in the dark touched his leg. Glafira clambered wearily across her husband, and sank into her place next the wall, trying to take up as little room as possible. Her body burned like fire, but she did not dare to move, hardly even dared to breathe.

“Don’t creep so close to the wall, you idiot,”

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said Klim Ivanovich presently in a strange voice. "Come closer to me."

Glafira timidly slid nearer, and then once more lay numb against her husband's clumsy body, her hot breath striking him on the shoulder.

A pause.

Then Klim Ivanovich turned to his wife.

CHAPTER IX

ZAKHAR lived alone on the farm.

On every side the steppe reached out, bare and dusty, to a dim distant horizon. But for a few wretched trees growing close to the house there was nowhere a green spot to be seen; only rust-coloured grass scorched by the burning sun, above which the hungry hawks circled disconsolately, and beyond stretched unbroken endless space, merging in a lilac haze. There was a terrible drought, the soil had cracked on all sides from the heat, and at night blood red heat lightning flashed across the sky.

Zakhar pined away from grief and loneliness. He had no news of what was happening at home. A few workmen from the town had come, but he was ashamed to question them. As they made no comment he concluded that things were more or less as usual. He knew that Glafira was lost to him for ever,

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and he had even grow accustomed to the idea, but the thought that Klim Ivanovich had beaten her to death would have been more bearable to him than that she should have become reconciled to his brother, and be living with him as his wife. The vision of it roused such a seething jealousy in Zakhar that he could find no rest.

During the day his work brought him some forgetfulness, but in the evening, and at night when everything on the farm was still, and he was left to himself, he could find no escape from his torment.

As soon as he lay down, and put out the lamp, the figure of Glafira would appear in the darkness, beautiful as sin, and more tempting than ever before. His whole body would grow rigid with a wild craving for her, and crazy thoughts chased through his mind; now he would drink himself to death, now go into a monastery; and again he would feel that the only solution would be to kill Klim Ivanovich. Brooding over the murder made it almost a fixed idea with him, and it hardly ever left

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his fevered imagination. Often in a waking dream as distinctly and palpably as though he had been there, Zakhar saw his brother's huge ungainly body, a gun-barrel, flame, smoke—and then blood! . . . Strangely enough, though, he could never picture his brother's face for some reason or other, and this tormented him most of all. There were moments when the urge to slay was so imperious that it burned through him like a flame, and the most trivial excuse would have been enough to change thought into action. This appalling obsession mastered him especially at night.

Then he would jump up, half dress himself, and ramble feverishly about the farm until daybreak. The dogs, recognising their beloved master, would follow him wagging their tails, but the vast steppe was impenetrably dark, remote and awful, and it would seem to him that day could never come.

After a week the old coachman came out and at last informed Zakhar of what had taken place since his departure. When he told how Klim Ivanovich had punished his wife, and

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how she had “squealed just like a stuck pig,” Zakhar’s hair stood on end, while black rings and a web of sticky threads of light danced in front of his eyes. But when the coachman told him that Klim Ivanovich and Glafira had made it up and were living once more as man and wife, Zakhar thought how good it would be to kill not only his brother, but Glafira also.

“It’s the old story. A woman’s a woman. The more you beat her the better she’ll be. Women aren’t so particular, so long as there’s a man. If it ain’t one, then it’s another.”

And it seemed to Zakhar that the old man was about right. Klim or himself—perhaps it made no difference to Glafira.

The coachman’s news tortured him intolerably. The words burned like hot irons into his soul, but he was consumed with a hysterical desire to hear the story repeated over and over. He was only interested in Glafira, but out of respect he asked after his mother also.

“Well . . . and how is my mother?”

“Your mother?” replied the coachman

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gravely. "How should she be? She bears her cross hardly. Do you think the dishonour of her family is an easy burden? Folks are laughing at her openly. At first she was very angry with you, but that passed. Say what you like, you are her son, and a mother's heart. . . . But do you know who really grieves for you, Zakhar Ivanovich?" The coachman suddenly broke off with a laugh. "Petenka! Would you believe it? He is wasting away! Mow! Mow!" The coachman mimicked the idiot. "He goes about looking for you. Come to think of it, it's very queer. He's only an idiot, but he is as devoted to you as though he were a sensible human being."

The coachman emptied his seventh glass of tea, turned it upside down to show that he wanted no more, put a small lump of sugar on top of the glass and said as he got up:

"Thank you, sir. Now it is time to go to bed."

Zakhar wanted to keep him, but dared not try.

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The coachman made the sign of the Cross before the Ikon hung in a corner high up under the ceiling, bowed once more and walked out, stopping at the door to turn and say:

“You must feel lonely here all by yourself. I wanted to bring your gun but somehow I forgot. . . . I’ll bring it along next time without fail.”

When he had gone Zakhar stepped into the yard and without his hat strode forth and vanished into the darkness of the steppe.

“I must kill him . . . kill him . . . kill him. . . .”

The thought beat upon his temples.

He did not return until morning, worn out, covered with mud, haggard, deathly pale. A farm wench on her way to milk the cows meeting him exclaimed:

“My! Didn’t you go to bed at all last night, Zakhar Ivanovich? You’ll kill yourself if you go on that way!”

Zakhar made no reply. His bearing struck her as strange. He looked at her as though

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he were frightened and he went off swaying to avoid her. The girl followed him with her eyes, shaking her head:

“I’d like to know what he’s been up to!”

And this is what happened in the night.

Glafira had already gone to bed when Klim Ivanovich, half undressed, shut the window looking out on the orchard. It was intolerably hot and close, but it was the immemorial habit of the Dikoys never to sleep with the windows open for fear of burglars.

Out in the yard it was so dark that the faint outline of roofs and trees could hardly be traced against the sky. There were many stars, but they were dim and hazy. A dazzling light fell on the leaves of the willow by the window, and they shone strangely green in the darkness. A little way from the house, the garden path loomed white. Now and then a sheet of purple heat lightning suddenly draped the sky with a glaring brightness while the dense black trees stood out. Next moment everything had vanished.

"There will be a thunderstorm," said Klim Ivanovich.

And at that very moment a deafening report broke the stillness of the air. The window pane was shattered and the flash of a gunshot revealed for a second the trunks of the nearest trees and a circle of green grass, the white path, and a human shadow, which disappeared at once behind the bushes.

Klim Ivanovich felt as though someone had struck him on the chest with all his might, and had vomited a scorching breath into his face. He had not heard the shot himself nor even realised what had happened. He staggered back a pace or two and fell heavily to the floor, both arms outstretched, dragging with him the chair on which he had hung his coat.

As he fell he called out in a desperate voice:
"Za. . . ."

But in the next moment his face assumed an expression of tranquil indifference, his body heaved convulsively, he gasped and at last lay rigid. From his left shoulder through his torn shirt black blood began to ooze.

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Glafira sprang from her bed, rushed frantically to the door, and gave a long penetrating scream, which rang through the whole house. People came running from all directions—hurrying footsteps, excited voices. A dog began to bark.

CHAPTER X

THE drama of the Dikoy household had occupied the gossips of the town for a considerable time, and the murder of Klim Ivanovich roused the greatest excitement.

And yet there was no mystery about the murder. Public opinion decided at once unanimously that Zakhar was the murderer. He was arrested next day, and put in gaol.

All the evidence pointed to it. The double-barrelled gun, with one empty cartridge case, and fresh smoke marks in one barrel, was found in the grass a few paces away from the window. The two workmen gave corroboration in their testimony that during the fight between the two brothers, Zakhar had tried to shoot Klim Ivanovich, and when the gun was taken from him had threatened that he would kill him anyhow—"shoot him like a dog!"

The farm wench said that on the night of the murder Zakhar had been away from the

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farm, and had been somewhere a long way off, and had not returned until dawn, dusty, dirty, tired, and looking "out of his wits."

"He was always very nice to me, but he did not even say a word to me that day," said the buxom wench. "As soon as I set eyes on him I thought—he must have murdered his brother."

The old coachman, though reluctantly, was made to admit that on the evening in question, Zakhar had plied him with questions about his brother and Glafira, and that all the time he had looked drawn and haggard.

"I said to him, I said: 'Spit on her, Zakhar Ivanovich. There are plenty of women in the world, and they were all created for the same purpose, for sure. . . .' But, no, I suppose he couldn't. He was very jealous and that was at the base of it all. The damned snake! She's ruined the man's life for no reason at all!"

One of the most important points at the inquest was the question: what did Klim Ivavich cry out before he died?

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That cry, or, to be more accurate, that despairing wail had rung through the house, and had been heard by almost everyone. Mother Anna had not yet gone to bed. Anisya was still clearing up the dining room, the workmen were still eating their evening meal in the kitchen, and the servant-girl was on the point of lying down in the passage while the kitchen-maid was with her soldier sweetheart near the gate. They were all positive that Klim Ivanovich had distinctly called out: "Zakhar!"

But the only eye-witness of the murder, Glafira, who was terribly drawn and pale in her black dress, insisted emphatically that Klim Ivanovich had uttered only one syllable: "Za——!"

And according to her what he meant to say was:

"Za-*chto?*" (What for——?)

Her supposition seemed arbitrary, and not at all convincing, though it was natural that Glafira should wish to screen her lover. It was well known that she did not love her hus-

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band, and that, after her infidelity, Klim Ivanovich had beaten and tortured her, while at the same time insisting on his marital rights. She had hastened to see Zakhar in person on the very day of his arrest on the farm.

As for Zakhar, he was shaken to the very bottom of his soul, and he made only the one reply:

“I did not kill my brother!”

When asked how his gun came to be found near the scene of the murder, he answered that he did not know.

“I left the gun at home. . . . I did not have it with me.”

Matfei, the coachman, remembered later that the gun really had been left at the house, and even that he had thought of taking it with him when he went to the farm, knowing how passionately fond Zakhar was of shooting, and thinking that he might be lonely out there on the steppe.

It was a pity he did not think of this vital point at the outset, and only mentioned it later during cross-examination, for, as he was clearly

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in sympathy with Zakhar, no great importance was attached to his evidence.

But when it came to the decisive alibi, the question as to where Zakhar had spent the fatal night, the accused only replied:

“I was wandering about the steppe.”

“All night?” asked the coroner.

“All night,” repeated Zakhar dully, seeing that they did not believe him.

“What were you doing?”

“Nothing. Just walking. I was unhappy.”

It was easy to see that Zakhar was reluctant to answer, as though he had no wish to defend himself. He was more alert and spoke with vehement horror, and loathing only when he was directly accused of killing his brother. He seemed to resist the idea of being thought guilty of so grave a crime, but at the same time to be utterly indifferent to his fate.

The coroner was puzzled by the attitude of all those who were immediately concerned in the case. They all gave their evidence frankly, but they seemed afraid to express their personal opinion and no one, not even Glafira

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and Mother Anna, showed any particular desire to exculpate the accused.

This circumstance was underlined and emphasised later by prosecuting counsel in his speech to the jury.

Strangest of all, however, was the behaviour of the accused's mother.

Immediately after the murder she had thrown herself frantically across her son's body, and in the hearing of the assembled multitude had shouted loudly that Zakhar, and no one else, was the murderer. But in cross-examination, she abruptly changed her tone, said as little as possible, and then refused to answer questions altogether, taking advantage of her privilege as a mother.

This also was used in support of the case for the prosecution.

In short, nobody doubted that Zakhar had killed his brother, but public interest was not so much in the murder itself as in the intrigue between Zakhar and Glafira, and the question was argued whether they would come together now that the blood of a brother and husband

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was between them, or would be forced apart for ever. The women insisted that they would come together. The men doubted it.

The opinion of the women was based on the feeling that by the murder of the husband Zakhar had proved his passion, but the men said:

“O! You don’t know these people! They consider it a deadly sin, and the man who has been guilty of it may take refuge in a monastery, but not sleep in the bed of his victim.”

Soon to everybody’s astonishment, it was known that although Glafira went to the gaol every day, Zakhar obstinately refused to see her!

“There!” said some triumphantly. “He does not even want to see her!”

“All the same she goes to see him!” retorted others.

“Well, she is a woman. For a woman in love there is no such thing as sin.”

In fact, Glafira went to the prison every day. Very beautiful and pale in her mourning, casting down her eyes and avoiding meet-

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ing any stare of curiosity. In her hands beneath her shawl, she always carried a little bundle of gifts for the prisoner. She would wait patiently by the gate, and when told that Zakhar did not wish to see her, she would go even paler, avert her eyes, and go away without a word, leaving her bundle with the warder. Later on she took her gifts away with her and handed them to some beggars, because Zakhar suddenly began to refuse to accept her presents.

In the Dikoys' house there were now only the two women and the idiot, Petenka.

The idiot! The murder had been such a shock to him that he seemed no longer to be a half-wit. At any rate there was a gleam of understanding in his eyes and he began to behave with a certain dignity as though his mind were in good order.

When Klim Ivanovich was murdered he had been so possessed with fear that he ran away from the house, and hid in the long grass somewhere behind the barns. He was not found until the evening of the third day, hungry,

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dirty and like a wild beast. He would not leave his hiding place, and when they tried to drag him out, he struggled and raved like a lunatic, and at last they only managed to induce him to come out by a trick: a pretty servant-girl, who had been offered half a rouble as a reward, was the bait to lure him into the open.

When the priest came to officiate at the funeral, and the smell of incense floated about the house, and the discordant nasal chant of the ceremony rang out, Petenka once more ran away and hid himself.

"There you are. . . . A half-wit, if you like, but even he is afraid of death!" the Reverend Father remarked.

Klim Ivanovich was carried along the main street to the cemetery, and the bells rang out even as they had done when he drove into the town with his young wife.

And now the wife, who had caused his death, was sole mistress of his house. To everybody's surprise Mother Anna who had had no love for her, and had even hated her after her infi-

delity, and had even incited her son to torture her, suddenly made peace with her, and handed over to her all the duties of the household.

On her side, too, Glafira showed the greatest respect and love for her mother-in-law, and looked after her as though she were her own mother. They often went to church together, and stood silently side by side through the service, both pale and stern in their deep mourning. And of late there had crept into Glafira's beautiful young face an expression that made it resemble a waxen Holy Image.

After the burial of one son, and the imprisonment of the other, Mother Anna suddenly grew old and feeble. She gave up all housework, only went out to church, and gave money for Masses and alms to the poor. At home she always sat in her room, and had her meals there.

Glafira took charge of the house, the mill, and the farm, and strange to say, proved herself to be an excellent manageress with a great deal of shrewd common sense, and a strong will.

At first everybody looked on her as an adulteress, and a murderer, and refused to obey her. The workmen dawdled, the girls frittered away their time. Anisya grumbled and threatened to leave. Anarchy reigned in the house. But after a week or so Glafira, somehow, managed to take everything into her hands, and though she never raised her voice, she made everybody obey her, until at last, they even began to respect her.

"That woman is a queen," they said in the market place. "Of course she has sinned. But the devil is strong. And who is there without sin? We're all human. Anyway—even if she has been the cause of it all, but for her the whole place would be stolen away bit by bit, and it is worth every bit of a hundred thousand."

When he heard of the catastrophe, Glafira's father came to see her, either with a desire to help or just to sit and warm his hands at the fire. He had become a hopeless drunkard, and had lost his wife and made a living by going

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round to fairs where he was often thrashed by the Peasants for swindling. Glafira received him respectfully, but firmly refused to let him do anything.

"No, Papa. Leave it alone. I will do it myself. I am the cause of it all. I shall take the responsibility and keep everything safe for the owners."

The old man was hurt and went away.

A short while before the trial Glafira went to the capital of the Province, and for a very high fee, retained the best lawyer to defend Zakhar. She had Mother Anna's consent in doing so, but the people in the town did not like it, and they began to say:

"The old woman is out of her wits and that hussy has got hold of everything. Give them time. Zakhar will be out of gaol, and they'll show us what they have been driving at."

It was strange that although everybody was convinced of Zakhar's guilt, yet in the market the conviction was prevalent that he would be acquitted.

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The superior people of the neighbourhood were baffled by such inconsistency, but the pedlars and the storekeepers kept their thoughts to themselves. They looked wise, kept silence, and answered all questions with:

“We shall see.”

CHAPTER XI

ZAKHAR's trial came on during the solemn days of Lent, when the air was filled with the smell of melting snow and the fields were flooded with crystal pools of water, and at night the moist gusty winds of spring blew, and all day the alternate bells rang for confession and repentance.

The Court sat in the Town Hall, in the Farmer's Hall, a vast room with a huge portrait of the Czar in a massive gilt frame, and in front of it a long table covered with a red cloth with golden tassels.

A large crowd had gathered. All the ladies of the district were present to follow the absorbing case, with its story of love and passion, jealousy and betrayal. They particularly wanted to see the persons of the drama: they had heard that Zakhar was very interesting and Glafira a great beauty.

The hall was thronged and presented a multi-coloured carpet with the ladies' dresses, military and official uniforms. In the back rows, stolid and solid, sat the tradespeople. There were no Peasants admitted for there was not room for all those who had wanted to get in, and the public were only allowed to enter with tickets of admission—an unheard of innovation which gave rise to innumerable intrigues, quarrels and accusations of favouritism.

The public were very animated, and there was a hubbub of restless and loud eager voices. Some were for conviction, others for acquittal, and heated arguments between the champions of the two points of view lasted until the appearance of the Judges, so that even the thrilling moment when the Clerk drones out: "Silence, the Court!" passed unnoticed. As the Judges took their places the excitement died down, and the noise which had been like the roaring of surf slowly subsided, and the hall was filled with a very solemn silence.

"Bring in the prisoner!"

Unfortunately the public were sadly dis-

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appointed at the outset. Glafira did not appear in court and Zakhar, though he was considered a very handsome fellow in his own station of life, had grown very thin and sallow during his stay in prison. His beard was long and unkempt, and he looked dazed and sullen. He answered questions in a thick heavy voice as though he had just been aroused from sleep.

From the benches where the ladies sat came a murmur of disappointment and a rustle of annoyance, and in the end they concentrated their attention on Counsel for the Defence, who had come from the great world, and was high up in government circles. There had been never a great man in the town since the memorable occasion of the invasion of Baty Khan.

The lawyer was a distinguished-looking little gentleman, with a greyish beard, and fine intelligent eyes. He had a rather peculiar habit of continually poking his nose forward as though he were sniffing at everything round him. He spoke very convincingly, with great

assurance, and a complete lack of affectation, and his voice was very pleasant, almost caressing.

The first part of the trial, the reading of the indictment, the taking of oaths, the hearing of the witnesses, who were all people of the lower classes, was not interesting, and disclosed only what was already known to everybody.

Taking it all round, the impression created by the indictment and the cross-examinations was such as almost to embarrass the acquittal party. Everything appeared so simple and obvious, it was so logical that Zakhar should have killed his brother, that the whole trial seemed to be reduced to an empty formality, the result of which was a foregone conclusion. The interest of the audience was only stirred when counsel for either side attacked each other, and even this was more sparring than anything else. The great man's speech had been eagerly awaited, but to the general astonishment the case for the prosecution was the more thrilling.

Nor did the great man show any striking talent in cross-examination. He took the old

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well-trodden way of trying to discredit the witness by ridicule.

Thus he asked the milkmaid from the farm, a saucy, sharp-tongued wench:

“You say that you saw straight away from the prisoner’s bearing that he had killed his brother?”

“I certainly did.”

“O! So it was written on his face?”

“I saw it straight away!” The girl cut him short brazenly.

“Well, I must admit that you have a talent for reading faces,” remarked Counsel for the Defence. “But perhaps you will tell us what kind of expression a man wears when he has just killed his brother.”

The girl did not understand the question, and made no reply.

“Well. . . . Never mind. But now tell us: You have sworn that the prisoner was in the habit of paying you marked attention. Of what nature were these attentions?”

The girl looked at the lawyer, then glanced

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sidelong at the audience and became bashful. There was a titter of laughter.

"You have just told us that on this particular morning he neglected to pay you the usual attention," Counsel went on maliciously. "What exactly did you expect him to do? Give you a kiss?"

The audience roared.

Counsel for the Defence questioned all the witnesses in this playful style, and only became serious when the gun was brought into court.

The witnesses all agreed that the gun had been taken from the prisoner at the time of the fight between the two brothers, but where it had disappeared afterwards no one could tell.

One of the workmen hazarded the opinion that probably Anisya, the cook, hid the gun in her room.

Counsel for the Defence clutched at this, but in spite of all his efforts no evidence was forthcoming to establish the fact. Nevertheless, it was clear to everyone that if the gun really had been in the attic, it would have been

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impossible for Zakhar to secure it without being seen. The attic could only be approached through the kitchen where the workmen had been at supper, or through the passage where the servant-girl slept at night, and it would have meant passing the open door of Mother Anna's room, and she had not gone to bed.

After that the question as to whether Zakhar could have travelled to town and back before dawn produced a long argument, and a discussion of minute details.

The coachman swore that he had left Zakhar at nine o'clock in the evening, and the milk-maid that she had met him in the farmyard at four in the morning.

"So altogether only seven hours passed." Counsel for the Defence counted them up, and almost everybody in the audience counted on their fingers, or with their watches. "The distance to the town is not less than twenty-six versts: there and back—fifty-two. That means that, without reckoning the time necessary for securing the gun and waylaying his brother,

the prisoner must have run without a stop at eight versts an hour. That is as fast as an ordinary farm horse going at full gallop. But even a horse cannot run fifty-two versts without a rest."

This was a master stroke and it produced a marked stir in the audience. Even the Judges exchanged significant glances. Zakhar's champions were triumphant. Only the Jury, of which Miloslowsky, the dealer, was Foreman, remained quiet and impassive.

Unfortunately the old coachman ruined the whole effect:

"It is twenty-five along the high road, which takes a bend, but if you walk straight across by the ford it does not take eighteen. I've often gone that way myself."

Here Counsel for the Prosecution interrupted to point out to the Jury that it was quite possible for Zakhar in his state of extreme nervous high tension, induced by what the coachman had told him of the torture inflicted on Glafira, to have run all the way. It was true that the route mentioned by the coach-

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man ran through ploughed fields, marshes and a ford—though only a shallow one—but it was known that Zakhar had returned terribly dirty and covered with mud and worn out.

It all fitted in so well that many of the audience could picture the murderer in the dark night wandering through fields and marshes, bareheaded with glaring eyes, his heart full of hatred, with the mark of Cain upon his brow. The question of the distance was buried, though Counsel for the Defence tried to prove, firstly, that the shorter distance had never been officially measured, and, secondly that even thirty-six versts could hardly be covered in so short a time since a horse could not run so far without stopping, much less a man.

“Moreover, the murder was committed at eleven at night, which would mean that the prisoner must have run from the farm to the town in two hours.”

When it came to the question as to what were the words that Klim Ivanovich had cried out before he died, Counsel asked Anisya, the

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cook, among other things: “Were you very frightened when you heard the shot?”

“I was so frightened that it went black in front of my eyes. I was holding a plate in my hands and it fell to the floor and broke into a thousand pieces.”

“What thought struck you first?” What did you think?”

“I thought right off; Now Zakhar Ivanovich has shot his brother!”

“You thought that at once?”

“That very second. The idea came like a flash of lightning.”

“Even before you heard the cry?”

“Even before I heard the cry.”

The servant-girl, who slept in the corridor, was so simple that nothing could be extracted from her except that she had been “a-a-awfully frightened.”

“Why do you believe that Klim Ivanovich cried out his brother’s name?” Counsel asked the other girl, who had been at the gate with her sweetheart.

“Why, everybody said he did. That’s why.”

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Counsel put the following question to the oldest and most intelligent of the workmen:

"Tell me, had Klim Ivanovich any reason to believe there was any danger threatening him from his brother? Did he ever say anything about it?"

The workman ransacked his memory.

"Yes. He may have had. Up to then Klim Ivanovich was frightened of nothing. But after the fight, he always ordered me to be careful to close the yard gate at night. And I had to stay in the kitchen. It is quite possible he was afraid. And why not? Zakhar Ivanovich is a savage, hot-blooded man. They're all the same in that family. In the fight he would certainly have killed his brother like a dog if we hadn't taken his gun away from him."

The other workman, who was a little younger, remembered that about two days before the murder, someone had thrown a stone from behind a fence at Klim Ivanovich. The workman knew that it was Petenka, the idiot, who had disliked Klim Ivanovich, because of his cruel treatment of him, even before, but

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had begun absolutely to hate him after his protector, Zakhar, had been driven out and ignominy and torture had been inflicted on his beloved Glafira. But Klim Ivanovich had had a different opinion as to who it was. His face had glowered darkly with anger, and he had rushed into the street, and, finding nobody, had said gloomily:

“That was Zakhar.”

All evening he had been sombrely silent and the slightest noise had startled him.

“Just like a harassed wolf,” said a third workman.

Counsel for the Defence then succeeded in establishing two facts: that Klim Ivanovich had lived in dread of an attack from his brother; and secondly: that when the shot was fired, all those who heard it at once felt and thought that Zakhar had killed Klim Ivano-vich.

The hearing of the witnesses concluded.

After a pause the trial reached its second stage, the speeches for the prosecution and the defence.

CHAPTER XII

“GENTLEMEN of the Jury,” Counsel for the Prosecution began. “We have to try a terrible tragic crime, a crime which, alas, is an almost daily event in Russian life. Our people are barbarous and ignorant. Russian literature has idealised them, calling them a people of God-bearers and God-seekers! But if the second title is justified in so far as a primitive human being seeks after God, the first is utterly baseless either in the past or in the present of the Russian nation. The whole of Russian history is one long chronicle of senseless, ruthless rebellions, cruel conquests, blood-thirsty princes and fanatical monks. The Russian people are not even religious, they are only superstitious. The spirit of the Christian doctrine of which they think themselves the anointed is foreign and incomprehensible to them. True, you can hear them say: ‘Christ

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suffered, so we, too, must bear our Cross!' But the personality of Jesus Christ and the sublime ethics of His teaching is beyond them. They believe rather in the Walpurgis-night, the evil-eye, Ikon lamps, the Holy relics of the Saints, the external, idolatrous side of religion, than its inward sense. . . . 'The Russian woman,' a gifted Russian author has said, 'weeps when she hears the words of the Gospel in church, but she weeps because she cannot understand them!'

"We must open our eyes before it is too late, before the triumph of those political creeds, and factions, which with cynical recklessness have planted their hope and faith in the mission of the Common Man. We must realise that there is nothing unique about our people, that, like every other uncivilised race that has lived for hundreds of years in complete darkness—they are simply a horde of barbarians whose ideal has always been the freedom of Anarchy, freedom to rob and murder. Perhaps the time is at hand which will convince us all of this, when the call to open robbery

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will lash this wild ocean into a storm and blood will spout to Heaven to the horror and amazement of Europe and the whole civilised world. Yes. We are savages. Fighting, theft, rape, lynching and murder have always been prevalent with us. The Green Snake* and the Red Cock* are always our domestic pets. We are still in the Prehistoric Ages, and the traces of our Asiatic origin have not yet faded from our faces and our souls. We have protruding jawbones and narrow eyes, and our passions are wild and unbridled. Only a real Russian poet could ever have sung with such feeling:

‘If you love, love without thinking.

If you threaten, make no jest of it.

If you curse, curse with all your might.

If you strike, strike hard.’

“We lack measure and purpose in everything. Our religious feeling takes the form of a fanatical sectarianism. An ideal becomes a dogma. A political struggle degenerates into Red Terrorism and merciless dictatorship. Our literature is either a blatant prophecy

* Alcohol and arson.

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hurled in the face of the world, or a shameless baring of our souls and self-flagellation. Our songs are either wild lamentations or a savage dissipation. Our national heroes are Stenka Rawzins and Pugacheffs or emaciated Father Seraphims, ascending to Heaven on the Parsifal ladder of ‘one wafer a day.’ Our inventions are the knout and the chain-gang. Our happiness is a drunken orgy. Our love is either martyrdom or torture. In the breaking wave of our passion we swamp everything, trample everything in the mud: honour, family, our very selves. Our young girls are not virtuous, our wives are not faithful, not because they are corrupt and wicked, but because they are ruthless and hold nothing sacred when they are in love. Lovelorn women fill our convents, while the disappointed lover puts a bullet through his brain or stabs his sweetheart. We are all loungers, spendthrifts, gamblers, drunkards, and the fine flower of our Intelligentsia yields nothing to the lowest in this respect. From the luxurious *Yar** down to

* Fashionable gipsy night restaurant near Moscow.

the meanest Red Inn, Russia is covered with *maisons de plaisir*. And if our village recruits on the way to fulfil their patriotic duty sometimes smash up a tavern or two, the students, our pride and hope, will tear down a brothel on their holidays, singing *Gaudeamus!* . . . And all this is not because we are brutes or decadent. We have intelligence and the capacity for great deeds and deep truth—but we are above all savages, and like the savage we lack self-control, we cannot master our passions. We are vast as our steppes, chaotic as our primeval forests. Great forces slumber in us, but we do not know how to use them and they destroy us. How absolutely right are those statesmen who have declared a thousand times and still maintain—unmoved by the shrieks of the radical press—that the Russian people need the guidance of a firm hand. Disaster will overtake us when the power that saves us from ourselves is withdrawn and leaves us free to do what we like. Like children playing with fire, we shall burn our unhappy land to ashes, we shall destroy every-

thing, lose all sense of proportion, pursue unattainable aims, sink into a world of Utopias and wake up at last—hungry, ruined, cold, beggars, having lost all that we had and ourselves with it.

“You will ask me: Has all this anything to do with the case we are here to try? It has. Before you in the dock stands a typical son of vast, wild Russia, a tradesman’s son, a happy-go-lucky fellow like the youths in our legends, a regular Russian Paladin, Zakhar Dikoy. There are plenty of such Paladins in our country. They not only cock their hats but their brains, too, at an angle. Let them throw back their shoulders and swing their arms, and they are all passion and bluster.—The whole country swarms with them. They provide our literature, our political parties, and they are only waiting for the opportunity to show their prowess and their licence to the whole world. And they will show them! The world will quake and civilised Europe will shiver with terror: Zakhar Dikoy is coming!

“How symbolic this common Russian name is! Dikoy! The Savage!

“Indeed we are savages.

“Only in Russia do such types and such families exist.

“I am going to tell you the story of this family.

“Their grandfather kept an inn on a much frequented highway. He robbed passing travellers and without much discrimination. Their father had the whole district in his clutches. He gave much money to the church, but he skinned both the quick and the dead. The sons went the same way, the way of swindling, fraud and exploitation. Their fortunes were built up of blood and mud, and blood spattered the whole of the second generation to find expiation only in the third.

“In the third generation the family is left without its head. The mother and her three sons are living in the house. The mother is a bigoted fanatic, a shrew and a miser. She tends the ikon-lamps, hoards money and from dawn to sunset, nags at her sons and her serv-

ants. Her eldest son, a torpid, narrow-minded usurer, an egoist and a perverse tyrant, is a man of dark passions and dangerous frenzies. The second son is a jolly devil-may-care, to whom life, either his own or that of a fellow creature, is not worth a groat. He is a spend-thrift, a drunkard, and a debauchee. The youngest is a worthy sprout of such a family tree, an idiot. Not for nothing did this father and mother call him a punishment sent from God. Their life is taken up with shady business transactions, smug religion, drinking bouts and the lascivious satisfaction of their unbridled and savagely primitive desires. This is life as it is lived by savages, and by many families, indeed, by many millions of people in Russia today—aimless, without ideals or guiding principles, and with no sense of responsibility. Do not object that this family is an exception, that they belong to a particular class of people, representative of the so-called ‘dark empire.’ No, such savages are as often found in palaces in Petrograd, wearing court uniform and high sounding princely names as

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among village bullies, wearing a priest's cassock, or in workmen's dwellings, wearing the workmen's blouse as the emblem of a glorious new culture, the proletariat! . . . To remove any feeling that I am generalising I could quote hundreds of cases of brutal murder by the pomaded dandies of the Nevsky-Prospekt, or representatives of the respected middle class, or a sturdy peasant, or a common unidealised workman. For all these heroes are above all Russians! . . . But we are wandering far afield. . . . Let us return to the Dikoy family.

“Some years go by. The eldest son marries, and a new figure appears in the household. The young wife is beautiful with that crude sensual Russian beauty, that wild beauty of which we hear so much in our songs: ‘her hair reaches down to her heels, she walks like a peacock, her neck is like a swan’s and her soul’ —well, her soul is that of a healthy brood-mare. She marries, not out of love, but simply because she has reached the age for sensual enjoyment. The time for marriage has come—

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and that is all. Alas: ninety-nine out of every hundred of our Russian women still marry and become someone's mistress for the same reason. And can savages mate in any other way?

"The fateful Glafira, who has bewitched her savage husband with her savage beauty, enters the household, and looks proudly round, only too well aware of the power of her young, lovely and healthy body. She enters the household with no thought of duty or responsibility, just like her captive primeval ancestress who dried her tears the day after her rape and dumbly prepared the food in her captor's hut, and so, apathetically and dully, this contemporary Russian savage accepts her new life. She gives herself to her husband whom she does not love because the law says so, but her sensual nostrils quiver when her eyes light on the tall handsome figure of her husband's brother. Zakhar Dikoy is unmarried, he prefers a free life without ties, and his favourite song is: 'Meddlesome matchmakers, leave me alone—Nay: you shall never see me married. Why

should I deprive myself of freedom? Why give up all the girls for one?"

"At the sight of his alluring sister-in-law his savage blood catches fire. He has been brought up in hypocrisy: he is afraid of God, afraid of sin, but only with the fear of the savage, which operates only in the absence of temptation. If he wants something very much he can cast his God aside and laugh at sin. Some trivial incident sets an unrestrained animal passion ablaze. Their sensual orgy lasts three months; their brains seethe, their reason is swept away in the fierce blast of their passion. The whole household knows of their relations, but they are blind, hear nothing, think of nothing, but the rapture of their embraces. Zakhar no doubt knows that if their intrigue is discovered everything would go to Hell—home, happiness, even life itself. But that does not restrain him. He loves and is devoured by his love. The world may sink for all he cares. And their intrigue is discovered.

"Drunken with love they forget all caution, and in characteristic Russian fashion leave it

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to chance to conceal them. They take such risks, become so reckless, that Glafira even decides to leave her husband during the night to go to her lover. Disaster becomes inevitable. A savage bestial struggle ensues between the two brothers who are now rivals. A real fight between two savages, two males battling over a female who has been thrashed almost to death. Only by chance do they avoid a fatal outcome. Zakhar Dikoy goes or rather runs away from the house to the farm on the steppe and lives there alone, consumed with anger, jealousy and unsatisfied longing. His brother, who until now was after all the nearest human being in the world, becomes over night his deadliest enemy, for he is the bar to his dearest pleasure. Does his conscience trouble him in his solitude? Does he think of the shame he has brought on his family, does he repent of his vile and cowardly actions? No. He is dominated by passion and passion alone. The image of the beautiful Glafira haunts him. Day and night he thinks only of her charms. He tries to make himself drunk—a Russian

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remedy—to seek oblivion. He even tries to forget his temptress in the crude embraces of the country wenches, but all in vain. Like an animal he roams about the farm, finds no rest, and listlessly neglects his work. We are doing him no wrong in saying that never for a moment did it enter his mind to seek relief in a sincere admission of his sin and in a new pure life of work. No, he thinks rather of a rope round his neck or a monastery.

“At last the old coachman comes from the town and tells him how Glafira has been thrashed and that her husband has forced her to live with him again and that she is acquiescent. A cultivated man would have turned away in contempt from such a woman, a slave, a mere female, but a Russian thinks differently. What is the soul of a woman to him? He thinks only of her body, and this woman’s body is so alluring. . . . Does the savage feel moral repulsion? It often happens that men in society marry prostitutes and throw their lives at the feet of some dancer, while in the lower classes it is quite usual to marry a girl

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with child—or to forgive the birth of a child of which the husband is not the father. So much the better! The child will grow and there will be more hands to do the work. . . .

“So Glafira has already forgotten him? She is living with her husband again. Will he spurn her now? Not at all. . . . But vengeance must be exacted, not from the woman who is steeped in guilt, but from an entirely innocent man, because that man is her husband and is in the way. It is the logic of a savage.

“Hardly has he got rid of the coachman than Zakhar Dikoy grabs his gun and bareheaded in a frenzied lust for blood and vengeance, runs across the fields in the night, through the forests and the marshes—to kill! . . . To kill! And that is all. He is incapable of thinking what may come of it all. Savages cannot follow a logical train of thought.

“He reaches the house. Everybody has retired to rest. He sees the light in the window and his brother, half undressed, preparing for bed. And Glafira is in the bed. . . . He

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knows that and the blood rushes to his head. How long did the murderer have to wait in front of the window for that opportunity? Who can tell? The witnesses state that Klim Ivanovich was a long time in going to bed, and that he paced up and down his room and twice went out into the passage, once to give an order for next day, and again to get a drink of water. It was a dark night and a thunder-storm was gathering. Perhaps the murderer lay in wait half an hour, perhaps an hour—but even this time of waiting did not bring him to his senses. No shadow of remorse moved in him, nor any realisation that it was his own brother that he was planning to shoot. No. His mind was clouded with passion. With the tenacity of a wild beast he stalked his prey. At last the opportunity arrived. The shot rings out. His brother falls—with hardly time enough to cry out the name of his murderer, whom, of course, he recognised by the flash of the gun shot.

“Now, at once a sudden, terrible reaction sets in.

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“Men of unrestrained passion always act blindly, thinking of nothing but the fulfilment of the purpose and the satisfaction of their rage. But as soon as their goal is reached, their conscience suddenly awakes and only then do they see the horror of what they have done.

“When he heard human voices and dogs barking, on the disturbance of the shot, Zakkhar Dikoy started off headlong; not from fear, not because he wanted to escape, but simply —away, away from the scene of the murder, as quickly as possible. The gruesome reality of his crime, now actually committed, irrevocable, struck his soul like a flash of lightning. He did not even try to destroy the evidence: made no attempt to wipe out his footmarks, left the most damning proof, his gun, behind, never troubled to restore his clothes to order, made no effort to reach the farm unnoticed or to think of any alibi to account for his absence during the night. On the farm, of course, nobody knew and he could easily have left his room next day looking like a man

who had slept peacefully during the night and had not the least suspicion of what had happened. But Zakhar no more thought of denial than he did of flight. He gave himself away. Like an animal he crawled into his corner, ate nothing all day long, refused to answer when spoken to. The bloody mist had passed away from before his eyes and the horror of what he had done stood constantly before him and his conscience gave him not a moment's peace.

"What did he care now for prison or disgrace? Men of strong passions swing from one extreme to the other: first crime, then repentance. All Russian murderers end their lives fasting and in chains. Not for nothing did the gifted writer, the man who knew more than any other of the Russian soul, say of Russian thieves and murderers: 'And each has a conscience that one black day will awake . . .

"Yes. First the senseless, reckless, headstrong gust of unbridled passion, then the Gordian knot of tangled lives, then crime, and in the end either suicide or repentance. The Rus-

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sian soul knows no other way and Zakhar Dikoy traced the circle with remarkable precision. For him, the healthy, happy debauchee, for whom the whole meaning of life lay in the pleasure to be derived from a woman's charms, death is terrible: crime is easier. He chooses crime, but as soon as he has committed it, his spirit is dashed to the ground. Ah! now he will humbly bear the cross of retribution.

"Observe now with what an air of apathy he follows these proceedings which are to decide his fate. True, he denies his guilt, but he does it mechanically as a matter of form. 'I did not kill my brother!' That is all he says. It is all the same to him now. 'Let them think what they like. . . . Let them put me in prison. . . . Let them execute me. . . .' The judgment of his new-born conscience is more terrible to him. He is entirely wrapped up in himself, facing that mysterious tribunal which is seated in his own soul and has found him guilty of murder. His wavering spirit is now filled with a new delight, that of self-inflicted

pain. Life has lost all interest for him. He does not even care any longer to see the woman for whose sake he committed murder and lost his soul. . . . Why, of course, if he were not guilty everything would be quite different. The unjust accusation would have horrified and infuriated him. He would have done his utmost to prove his innocence and to regain his freedom, and to share it with the woman, also free, waiting for him with her love, the woman he loved so much. If the blood of the dead man had not risen up between them, if he had not this murder on his conscience—then the death of his brother would have been an unhappy accident, a misfortune, but it would have paved the way to happiness and love! Where good luck fails, misfortune sometimes succeeds.

“But as it was he who killed his brother, the picture changes. Freedom holds out no promised joy for him. The ghost of his murdered brother haunts him. How could he clasp his bride with bloodstained hands? No. . . . From now on everything is over between them.

Nay, more; if he were innocent would the attitude of his mother and his mistress towards him be what it is? In the class in which he was born a mother is a tigress. She would have stuck at nothing to wrest him from the hands of his jailors. She would have dogged the officials with petitions. No earthly force could have made her leave the prison gates. So would the mother have been: so much more the mistress. . . . But here we find nothing of the sort. They are both fundamentally simple women, God-fearing in their way. They are depressed and miserable, but they know that he has committed a great sin and according to their understanding he must bear his punishment. His mother prays for him all day long. His mistress brings him food in prison, but to them he is no longer a son and a lover, but only a poor sinner, who needs consolation, and is at the mercy of the living God. And they bear their fate in silence."

Counsel for the Prosecution then summarised the incriminating evidence concisely, disposing in advance of objections that were

likely to be raised by the defence, and he concluded:

“You now have before you a complete picture of the crime, with the logical train of events. It is all plain and simple. It is written in the faces of each and every one who has appeared before this court; but even if we had not their crushing and irrefutable proofs: —the prisoner’s gun, his absence during the whole night, his mudstained clothes, evidence of a long rough journey, and the death-cry of the murdered man who called out the name of the murderer—even then I should still say —as I say now: There is the murderer, there he stands in the dock before you. Judge him! Judge in his person all the savagery, all the unbridled licence, all the debauchery, all the spiritual weakness from which Russia suffers —and from which Russia may soon perish!”

CHAPTER XIII

THERE was a short pause after the speech for the prosecution during which the court-room and the surrounding passages surged like an angry sea. The audience split up into groups which broke into heated and passionate debate. It seemed as though the speech had suddenly opened all eyes, and from the dark depths of the seemingly banal trial had suddenly gushed the sinister inwardness of it all, of which no one until now had been aware.

That Zakhar was the murderer was no longer anywhere in doubt: that seemed beyond question. The picture painted by prosecuting counsel was as clear as though he had read the souls of all involved like an open book. Many passages in his speech conjured up ideas which led far beyond the actual crime and deposed the question of Zakhar's individual fate to a secondary plane. Russian society

was at that time living through a very critical phase—due to the unhappy war and the approach of the revolution—and therefore the prosecutor's analysis of the Russian soul struck home and deeply impressed many of those present. Certain sentences in the speech were repeated with a peculiar satisfaction, as: “The Russian people are not religious, they are only superstitious” . . . “Fighting, murder, rape are immemorial customs” . . . “Russian murderers and thieves end in fasting and chains of repentance” . . . “Our freedom is anarchy, our politics either terror or merciless dictatorship” . . . Above all the observation: “Perhaps the time is near when an open call to general plunder will lash into a storm that wild ocean, the Russian people.”

“Yes, my dear, Europe will yet see wonders. . . . Europe will be aghast!”

“Yes! Our freedom is anarchy, our creeds are fanaticism, our revolution means bombs, terrorism and merciless dictatorship,” words like these were echoed among the audience. “Look out, some day these savages will show

you what they are. Freedom? Ridiculous! Can freedom exist in a country ninety-nine per cent. of whose population consists of Zakhars and Glafiras? Yes. We are drifting to anarchy. That is as clear as daylight."

There were some, mostly raw boys from the college, headed by the teacher of Russian, a Social Democrat and a Bolshevik, who were furious with the Prosecuting Counsel, and called him "an agent of the Black Hundred," because he had praised "certain statesmen" and identified the savage Zakhar with "our great Russian people" in general and in particular with "our remarkable proletariat. . . .!"

" . . . I'm not arguing. As far as the lower middle class are concerned, he is right. They are visibly rotting away. But the proletariat. . . . !"

" . . . Mark that he alluded to Yousoupoff . . . hinted at village bullies. . . . But when he came to the proletariat he had to stop! The proletariat made him stop! Ha! Ha!"

On the whole, however, the speech made a great impression and very few were left to

take any interest in what the defence might have to say in Zakhar's favour. There was no doubt that he would be condemned.

Counsel for the Defence, Dukhovetzsky, the famous barrister, seemed to feel how opinion was running, for his nostrils twitched more continuously than ever. Nevertheless, he began his speech with great self-assurance and a certain note of irony.

“Gentlemen of the Jury: We have heard a brilliant speech, a speech which spread far beyond the frame of this trial and has sprinkled a wave of dust over almost the whole map of our Empire. As it ranged over so many recent events, hopes and fears, that speech must have touched many hearts. Though more than one objection could be raised against his frequently far-fetched generalisations in his portrait of the Russian Soul, yet one must compliment my distinguished adversary on his courage and the vigour of his psychological analysis. I do not propose to dispute that side of his argument, not because I am impressed with its accuracy, but because we are not a meeting of a

philosophical society. We are in a Court of Justice and I am not a rhetorician, but merely Counsel for the Defence: my duty bids me first and last to bear in mind the fate of my client who awaits your judgment. You really cannot make him responsible for all our national failings and punish him as a symbolic person. We are here to judge and only to judge, and I cannot spare Counsel for the Prosecution the serious rebuke that his oratorical gifts have drawn our attention away from a living, suffering soul. We cannot solve world-problems: we are not called upon to decide great historical questions. The one and only issue which stands before us clearly, simply and unquestionably is: Did Zakhar Dikoy kill his brother or did he not? And instead of that we have been told about the Russian Soul and Europe and Asia, about anarchy and chains of repentance, and other, no doubt, very interesting matters as to which there is only the one rather vital complaint, that they have only the very flimsiest connection with this trial."

Many of the audience laughed, and Counsel, satisfied by the impression he had made in releasing the general tension, went on:

“And so I shall abstain from all general arguments and come straight to the root of the matter: Is Zakhar Dikoy the murderer or is he not? I believe, I am convinced and I hope to prove, that he is not! What proof of his guilt has been forthcoming? The so-called proofs are many and can be divided into two categories: circumstantial evidence, and psychological hypotheses.

“As for the evidence, it is as follows: the gun, the absence of the prisoner during the night, his muddy clothes, the threat—‘I’ll shoot you like a dog,’ and lastly, the victim’s death cry, which, it has been contended, was the name of the murderer. This evidence is gravely compromising, but only in conjunction with the preconceived and unshakable idea that only the accused and no other could have been the murderer. It is strange that not once during the whole trial or even during the preliminary examination was the question

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raised: Might not someone else have killed Klim Ivanovich Dikoy? No, the prisoner was declared guilty at the outset and every investigation, every excursion into the realms of psychology, took this supposition as their starting point: Zakhar Dikoy is the murderer! Of course, if that is so, then everything, the gun, his absence during the night, the victim's cry and all the items of evidence fit together like the slices of a melon. But suppose for a moment that in spite of all this so-called irrefutable circumstantial evidence it was not Zakhar who killed Klim Ivanovich Dikoy? Then all these details must be derived from another explanation. Is it really true that no one but Zakhar could have been the murderer? Think of the hard character of the dead man; think of his whole life, based entirely on fraud, swindling, exploitation; think of the many he has hurt; the more he has ruined; and how often he must have treated his employees harshly, cruelly and mercilessly. I am not far from the truth when I say that a man who was hated even by his

idiot brother must have been not exactly loved by many others. In that respect that murder as an act of retribution is a commonplace event in Russian life, my learned colleague is absolutely right. We have not yet reached the stage of an organised struggle with an exploiting class, and in that conflict our customary weapon is lynch law.

“Were I, as Counsel of the Prosecution has done, to indulge in a divagation, I could point to the fact that even our political parties appeal to mob-rule. Therefore let us not pre-judge the question of who killed Klim Ivano-vich. We are here to find out who did.

“Let us first consider the seriously incriminating evidence which points to the prisoner’s guilt. The most important item is the gun, but no attempt has been made to trace the whereabouts of the gun prior to the murder. Counsel for the Prosecution has definitely and fairly refused to attach any belief to the statement of the workman who said that the gun was hidden in her room by Anisya, the cook; nor does he accept the testimony of the coach-

man who emphatically stated that he meant to take the gun out to the farm but unfortunately forgot to do so. Now, if the gun was in Anisya's attic it is plainly impossible for Zakhar to have secured it without being seen by the servant-girl, or his mother, or the three workmen in the kitchen, or the murdered man himself who several times walked along the passage leading to the attic. Nor is that all. The gun was taken from the prisoner during his fight with his brother, when he was forcibly dragged to his own room and locked in. Could he possibly at such a moment have watched and seen where the gun was being concealed? Of course not. He was not even thinking of the gun. And it follows that not only would he have had to steal the gun, but he would have been forced to look for it all through the house without being seen by a whole crowd of people. Which is absurd. . . . It has not been explained how the gun was found—but let us leave the gun for a moment.

“I pass on to another point. Zakhar Dikoy says that he wandered about the steppe all

night, driven to despair by the coachman's story of the torture and betrayal of his mistress. The prosecution refuses to believe him—but picture to yourselves, Gentlemen of the Jury, how that story must have affected him. Remember that Zakhar Dikoy was passionately in love with this woman who was beaten by her husband with leather reins until she shrieked so that her voice was heard ringing through the courtyard—'like a stuck pig' as one of the witnesses described it. Remember that this brute in human form after having tortured and degraded his helpless wife forced her to satisfy the lust which her sufferings had aroused. What man among us could hear such a story without losing his mental balance? . . . Counsel for the Prosecution takes it for granted that the prisoner must immediately have been filled with thoughts of a bloody vengeance. Perhaps such thoughts would have been roused in the mind of a more cultivated and sensitive man than Zakhar Dikoy. But precisely because he was too primitive, savage and unenlightened, such an

idea would not have entered his mind. Glafira was his brother's wife, his lawful wedded wife. By his intrigue with her he had, according to the morality of his class, committed a deadly sin, the deadliest of all. In his own eyes Glafira and he are criminals, sinners, and their guilt in the sight of God and before his Mother was very grave. In a blaze of passion they had broken a sacred Law, but they accept the expiation of their sin as the decree of supreme justice. Remember how, without a murmur, Glafira submitted to her torture, remember that no one came to her help when her shrieks rang through the house, remember that her own mother-in-law with her own hands gave Klim Ivanovich the reins he had forgotten —all because they all agreed that when a woman forgets her wifely duties and dishonours her husband she must bear the punishment! . . . And Zakhar Dikoy is flesh of the flesh, soul of the soul of this submerged class. Gripped by a sensual passion he sins with his brother's wife, but the sin once committed, consciousness of his guilt against his

brother never leaves him. True, he loved this woman, true, he longed for her when they were parted, true, the tale of her sufferings and betrayal tore at his heart, but not for a moment did he doubt his brother's right as a dishonoured and outraged husband, to act as he did. . . . It may safely be said that in his brother's place Zakhar would have acted precisely or almost precisely as Klim Ivanovich did. In his heart he was already reconciled to the loss of his mistress. What could he do? It was his fate, his bitter destiny! When he heard that Glafira was living with her husband again, probably he felt a purely physical jealousy, and a cruel anguish, but he realised definitely that it was inevitable: she was Klim's wife, and his wife she would remain. The outlet of divorce and separation would not come into consideration, for to that class these are an even worse disgrace than an illicit relationship. . . . Is it not written: 'Whom God hath joined let no one put asunder?' . . . And so in agony, dogged by jealousy and grief, he roams across the steppe like a lost soul all through the night,

trying to deaden the travail in his soul through physical exhaustion. It may well be that he flung himself on the ground, and wallowed in the mire in a torpor of despair. . . . In the morning he returns home, worn out and dirty. The violent pain has become a dull ache. He hides himself in a corner and neither eats nor drinks and speaks to no one. Such a spiritual collapse after a deep emotional crisis is familiar to us all. And what reply could he have given to the direct question: ‘What were you doing all night on the steppe?’ No other than the one he gave: ‘I was walking about’ . . . Did he know himself what he was doing?

“I shall not waste much time over Zakhar’s threat to kill his brother on the fatal night of the discovery of Glafira’s guilt. It is only too clear that this was merely the threat of a man swept away by the fighting spirit in the middle of a struggle. He was blind with rage when he ran to fetch his gun, beyond himself when he shouted: ‘I’ll shoot you like a dog!’ still in that condition when they wrenched the gun away from him and dragged him away.

. . . Believe me, if every such threat were carried out there would be very few people alive today in our vast Russian Empire.

“As for the victim’s death cry, permit me to observe that this proves absolutely nothing, chiefly because we do not know what the deceased was trying to say. Granted for a moment that we attach no credence to the evidence of the one eye-witness, Glafira, because it would be only natural for her to try to exonerate her lover—though I must remark in passing that this is directly in contradiction of the prosecutor’s statement that both she and her mother-in-law are simple God-fearing women who humbly submit to divine retribution. Where is her ‘humility,’ if she lies and prevaricates?

“But this is not the crux of the matter. The other witnesses all maintain that the deceased distinctly shouted the name of his brother. But you must recollect that Klim Ivanovich collapsed almost simultaneously with the gun shot and that he uttered the cry with his last breath. Could that cry have been so clear and

articulate that it could have been understood even at a great distance? Of course not. It was the last roar of a dying brute.

“But let us suppose that the witnesses really were able to distinguish Zakhar’s name in the death cry. . . . Do you realise that as soon as they heard the shot they were all as one man seized by the thought of Zakhar, a fact easily accounted for when we take into consideration the atmosphere of the household shortly before the murder. Is it not then perfectly logical that in the wild cry of the dying man they should believe they heard the name that was on the tip of everyone’s tongue? You must admit that this is highly probable.

“However, I am willing to concede even more! Let us suppose that the deceased actually did cry out his brother’s name! What would that prove? That he had recognised him by the flash of the gun? Absurd! That is out of the question because the flash of a gun fired at short range blinds the victim, while the murderer who is behind the flash is lost in darkness. No, Klim Ivanovich could never

have recognised his brother, neither as the gun was fired, nor later, when the flash was lost in the darkness of the night. You will remember that he lived in continual fear of a fresh attack from his brother. You know that. We have succeeded in establishing that once when someone threw a stone at Klim Ivanovich he immediately shouted 'That was Zakhar,' and was obstinately convinced that it was so, though Zakhar at the time was a long way off on the farm, and though all the facts at our disposal tell us that it was the idiot, Petenka, who threw the stone. Klim Ivanovich was undoubtedly the victim of persecution mania. It is therefore easy to understand that in his last conscious moment, mortally wounded, he should think of his brother and cry out his name.

"And so we see that once we set aside the preconceived notion that it was Zakhar who killed his brother all the circumstantial evidence and all the psychological hypotheses of the prosecution do not stand the test. I shall have a few words to say about psychology later on.

“Meanwhile, let us go back and try to shed some light on a matter which in spite of the evidence has receded into the background, owing to the obstinate refusal of the prosecution to take an unprejudiced view and to admit the possibility of the prisoner’s innocence.

“I wish once more most emphatically to insist on the absolute impossibility of Zakhar Dikoy’s having been at the scene of the crime twenty versts away by eleven o’clock, after he had parted with the coachman on the farm at nine o’clock, to waylay and murder his brother. Even if the distance be reduced—let us say that by crossing ploughed fields and marshes and crossing the ford the distance could be cut down to eighteen versts—do not forget that this is one of those famous Russian short cuts celebrated in the saying: ‘An old woman once measured it with a pair of crutches.’

“‘It can hardly be eighteen versts,’ says the coachman. But I myself, and competent experts whom I called in, have tried the shorter route and I can definitely say in the first place it is not eighteen but almost twenty versts, and

secondly that the going is very difficult through ploughed lands and dykes and that no horse, let alone a human being, could cover it without a stop. Even if Zakhar Dikoy could have accomplished the feat owing to his high nervous tension he would most surely have collapsed near the house from a heart-attack and it would have been impossible for him to manage the return journey to the farm. I insist upon this fact. I lay the greatest stress upon it and I demand that the Judges, of their conscience, shall not forget it for a moment. If they do this I am certain that they will acquit Zakhar of his brother's murder because it is physically impossible for him to have committed it in given circumstances.

"As for Zakhar's attitude and that of those near and dear to him after the murder and his own imprisonment, it seems to me that Counsel for the Prosecution was very near the truth when he ascribed their passiveness to a humble resignation in face of the well-deserved castigation of Fate. Naturally in the eyes of the world and in his own, Zakhar Dikoy had com-

mitted a grievous sin and deserved punishment.

"But that sin is not murder: it is the deadly sin of love for his brother's wife, the sin of incest. Counsel for the Prosecution is a man of culture, he thinks and judges differently from the class in which the crime took place! To him, as to every sophisticated mind, only murder is a really serious crime while an illicit relationship with the wife of a man's own brother is a minor offence, especially if the wife is beautiful. Such relationships are of frequent occurrence in "educated circles" and the feelings they arouse there are hardly more than a certain embarrassment. We have progressed too far beyond the primitive standards of morality of the submerged class from which the hero and heroine of such a trial as this have sprung. We can hardly understand how such terrible consequences would follow from such a comparative trifle as a romance of passion, even though it arose from a brother's wife.

"But their class think differently, and it is difficult to say which crime is the more deadly

in their eyes—murder or incest. Moreover they consider all unhappiness as punishment from God. What an awful impression the violent death of Klim Ivanovich must have made on those who felt they had wronged him! They robbed him of wife and honour and he died shamed and maimed. Counsel for the Prosecution is right; with the Russians retribution always follows close upon the crime. Zakhar Dikoy was guilty of a grievous sin. God punished his whole family for it, and they submitted to the unfathomable will of the Almighty. Zakhar decided to expiate his sin by the sacrifice of love, joy and happiness, and his mother and his mistress humbly accept his decision. Here lies the explanation of that strange passiveness both on the part of the prisoner and of his relatives. It is not indifference but submission: ‘God’s will be done!’

“The Prosecution says Zakhar killed his brother because he could not but kill him. I tell you that he did not kill him, because he could not. He might, perhaps, have been capable of killing a stranger, but under no cir-

cumstances—except some momentary uncontrollable fury—could he have plotted the murder of his brother against whom he had already committed so heinous a sin. No, the man who stands before you is not a murderer, but an unhappy blinded human being, lost in the mazes of his guilty passion. He is the victim of a fatal combination of circumstances.

“You ask me then: Who killed Klim Dikoy?

“That I do not know. I have not evidence enough in my possession to point to anyone and say: That is the man—for the inquest was conducted with only one end in view. But let me remind you that the threat uttered by Zakhar in the heart of the struggle—‘I’ll shoot you like a dog!’ was heard by many people. Who knows whether someone did not take advantage of that to settle an old score with Klim Ivanovich and throw the blame on someone else? Who knows whether the murderer was not living in the house, or indeed is not one of the very witnesses who have given evidence before you today? If

the murderer were living in the house it makes the appearance of the gun intelligible. And all the other evidence is merely circumstantial. However, these are only suppositions, but it is no mere supposition that we are here to try an innocent man because not a single proof has been produced by the prosecution which can stand the test of examination.

“Perhaps I have not succeeded in convincing you, but—no longer as Counsel for the Defence—as a human being I appeal finally to your human feelings. Think of the horrible irreparable consequences of a judicial error, that can never be undone.”

Counsel for the Defence concluded his speech. It cannot be said that his arguments convinced anyone of Zakhar’s innocence—the general opinion that he was the murderer was so deeply rooted—, but no doubt he had given many food for thought. A very strong impression had been created when Zakhar had burst into tears on the words about the ‘unhappy, misguided man.’

After the meandering and rather tame sum-

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mary of the judge, which covered the usual ground, 'that the jurors must act according to their conscience and must not be influenced by the eloquence of learned counsel' the Jury, which consisted mostly of tradespeople, adjourned to their room.

There was an air of indecision about the courtroom during the jury's deliberations which lasted more than an hour. Some regretted that they had allowed themselves to be carried away by the speech of Counsel for the Prosecution. The public spoke only in whispers and cast impatient glances at the door of the jury room. Zakhar sat motionless with bowed head.

Suddenly the bell sounded sharply from the jury room. Everybody started. The door opened, and the long black procession of the jurors filed into court. . . . At the head, Miloslowsky, a grey-bearded tradesman, well-known and respected in the town, walked forward with a sheet of paper in his hand. It was noticed that his face revealed a deep pity and much suppressed emotion, which he tried

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in vain to conceal. Many people thought that as he spoke the fatal word:

“Guilty”

the old man cast a humid glance at Zakhar and turned away with tears in his eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

DUKHOVETZSKY, the barrister, had reserved rooms in the only decent hotel in the town. It was situated in the market place and was called the Red House because it was built of rough red bricks. He occupied the “best room” in the Hotel, but even that in spite of that description was rather dirty and suspiciously redolent of vermin.

The trial ended very late and much against his will Dukhovetzsky had to stay the night as there was no train until noon the next day. He was very excited and in a bad mood that seemed to penetrate to the very depths of his soul. He had never for a moment doubted Zakhar's innocence and the unexpected verdict had dumbfounded him. After ordering a samovar, Dukhovetzsky walked up and down his room for a long time, twitching his nose and shrugging his shoulders. Now and then

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he stepped to the window and remained looking out at the square as though he were seeking an answer to his questions in its dreary impenetrable darkness.

The little town lay buried in the dense blackness of the night. Pools of water here and there stirred by the wind shimmered in the light of the solitary lamp of the police-station over the way.

The figures of the day's trial came to life again as they passed through the lawyer's mind—the jury with old Miloskowsky, with his grey beard, as foreman, the witnesses, Gafira and the Mother and last of all the prisoner himself. What strange, mysterious people they were! An ill-defined feeling took possession of the lawyer, and his fine nervous nostrils seemed to have scented what his brain could not grasp. Dukhovetzsky was ill at ease.

A deathlike silence filled the house. His room smelt of must, dirt and vermin. Somebody knocked softly at the door.

“Come in!” cried Dukhovetzsky.

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The door opened slowly and a tall woman entered with a black shawl round her head—a face strangely pallid and white like that of a Holy Image. Behind her loomed another grey formless figure like a shadow. Dukhovetzsky recognised the prisoner's mother, and was as abashed as though he alone were responsible for the outcome of the trial.

"Ah! It's you!" he said awkwardly.

"Yes, little father. It is I," answered the old woman gravely with a dignified obeisance.

The grey shadow behind the door bowed also but not at all with dignity, rather with a foolish alacrity. It was Petenka, the idiot, whom Dukhovetzsky had seen once before.

"We have come to see you, little father . . ." the old woman continued.

"Certainly, certainly," Dukhovetzsky muttered confusedly. "Please take a seat? . . . A glass of tea?"

"Many thanks," the old woman interrupted. "We couldn't think of tea just now. But I'll sit down. My feet ache."

She sat down, straight as a ramrod, hiding

her hands under her shawl, and stared at the lawyer with her sad heavy eyes that were still red from recent tears.

Dukhovetzsky sat down also.

A silence.

"My son has been condemned," said the old woman and her voice quavered.

"Yes," murmured Dukhovetzsky. "It took me by surprise. There must have been some terrible mistake."

Suddenly he noticed that something was disturbing him. The dim eyes of the idiot standing behind his mother were rivetted on him in a steady, searching gaze. Dukhovetzsky was forced now and then to look in the direction, but the idiot did not even blink.

"Don't give up hope," the lawyer went on. "The case is not lost yet. There are many reasons for an appeal. Another jury may give a different verdict. I am convinced myself, from the very depths of my soul, of your son's innocence. If you wish I will enter the petition for you or . . ." Dukhovetzsky suddenly flustered, "or perhaps you would like

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to put the case in the hands of another lawyer?"

The old woman shook her head.

"No, little father. We don't want another lawyer. We are quite satisfied with you. May the Lord give you good health. You did everything you could. There were many people who were moved to tears in the court, I'm told."

The old woman raised her hand and dried her eyes with her shawl.

"No! No! It was the Lord's will. The matter is closed. We don't want any petition. May God be with him."

"What do you mean? . . . You refuse to appeal?" asked Dukhovetzsky in amazement.

"Yes, little father. We refuse." The old woman moved her hands a little under her shawl and her head dropped.

Dukhovetzsky was amazed. He had expected just the opposite, tears and fawning entreaties to save the prisoner.

"But the verdict can be upset," he muttered. "I am sure. . . ."

"No. Let it be," replied the old woman still looking down as though she were concealing something. "Let it be. It is the Lord's will," she repeated and now she raised her eyes to meet his.

Dukhovetzsky spread his hands wide.

"It means imprisonment and hard labour! Is that what you want? Do you understand that? As you please, of course! . . . But the prisoner himself? It is my duty."

"He refuses, too, little father! I have spoken to my son. The authorities—God bless them—gave me leave. I have just come from the prison. He refuses to appeal, little father. He also refuses."

Dukhovetzsky let his arms fall helplessly and did not know how to go on. A painful silence ensued.

The old woman wondered for a little while, munched with her thin sunken lips, sighed and got up to go. Dukhovetzsky rose with alacrity.

"So you definitely refuse to appeal? Strange. Very strange."

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"That is our decision, little father! There is nothing more to be done. Thank you, thank you for all your trouble and may the Lord grant you every blessing. Don't doubt my word. It is God's holy truth. We are very well satisfied with what you did, and we shall remember it for ever! . . . Bow, Petenka!" she added suddenly with a new harsh note in her voice, stepping quickly aside not to hide the idiot who ducked behind her chair.

The idiot looked fearfully away from his Mother and at the lawyer and began to bob with a respectful awkwardness, staring dumbly and blankly like an animal.

"Kiss his hands, you fool," said the old woman in the same severe tone.

"What do you mean? Why?" stammered Dukhovetzsky confusedly.

"Of course. . . . And now let me beg you to excuse us. Please don't think badly of us either . . ." said the old woman, and she produced a large package from under her shawl and laid it on the table next the samovar. "May God bless you."

“Goodbye,” murmured Dukhovetzsky.

“Well, go along,” the old woman ordered, and she made a low bow and left the room, making her son precede her through the door.

The door was shut and Dukhovetzsky was left alone thoroughly nonplussed.

“I can’t make head or tail of it,” he said aloud with some vexation.

It was clear to him that a spiritual mystery of some sort was at the bottom of it all, but exactly what he could not make out.

“Can it really be that they have so burning a thirst for expiation? But he is not guilty. . . . The devil knows what it is all about. Strange, strange people!”

He spent a restless night. The vermin bothered him and he was haunted unceasingly by the idiot’s dumb blank animal expression.

Next morning while the carriage that was to take him to the station was being harnessed, Dukhovetzsky took a stroll through the town. He loved these little provincial towns with their grass-grown winding alleys, their empty squares, their little low houses and their gaily

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coloured churches. He himself had been born and bred in just such a town. But that was long ago.

The market place was a sheet of wet glistening mire. Wrapped in their shawls, with muddy skirts and boots, the women squatted on the ground near the stalls waiting for customers for their bread, sunflower seeds and dried fish. Two or three farm-carts with shafts upturned stood in the middle of the square, while the scraggy, pot-bellied horses mournfully chewed the hay which had been carelessly thrown down in the mud near the wheels of the waggons. The little town seemed strangely deserted and dreary. Behind the lace-curtained windows with their flower-pots not a single living face was to be seen, as though all the people were hiding from him—Dukhovetzsky. But every now and then, daintily stepping along the wooden pavements in his polished boots, an officer would swagger by, or an overdressed young woman would strut along. Then he met two schoolgirls in brown with neat blue aprons. Then came a

portly, imposing tradesman's wife with a shining silk shawl round her shoulders.

Dukhovetzsky suddenly remembered that his wife had asked him to bring her such a shawl. They had become the fashion among society women. Dukhovetzsky smiled tenderly as he thought of his charming young wife to whom he had been married only three years.

"I must buy one," he decided, pleasantly conscious of the large fee in his pocket. He accosted the tradesman's wife and politely raising his hat, asked:

"Would you be kind enough to tell me where I could buy a shawl like yours?"

The tradesman's wife had been at the trial the day before and she recognised the lawyer at once. She blushed with pleasure in her surprise, stopped and in her sing-song dialect began shyly to explain:

"Cross the square. . . . To the left of the Shopa—and you will come to Kusma Miloslowsky's shop. He keeps them."

"Thank you," said Dukhovetzsky, raising his hat once more, and he went in the direction

she had pointed out, rather tickled by the ambiguous word *Shopa*.

The tradesman's wife, however, stood still where he had left her, as though reluctant to part with so pleasant a subject for tittle-tattle and she called after him:

"Straight down that street. Straight down. Don't forget:—Miloslowsky."

Dukhovetzsky smiled and bowed repeatedly, at the same time taking care not to flounder into a mudhole.

It was dank and humid in Miloslowsky's shop. Along the walls were rows of shelves gay with muslins, silks and satins. There was an all pervading smell of calico. Behind the counter stood a spry youngster of fifteen, while at the cash-desk sat the stolid, grey-bearded shopkeeper drinking tea boiling hot from a cup which he held with outstretched fingers. At the sight of his customer he at once put his cup down, stood up with great dignity and raised his thick woollen cap.

"What can I do for you?" he asked in a businesslike tone.

Dukhovetzsky told him what he wanted.

"I have just what you require," said the old man. "Show them to the gentleman, Volodka. . . . No, not those. . . . Take them from the second row. You want something bright, don't you?"

"Yes, yes! The brightest you have!"

"Do you hear, Volodka," the shopkeeper called to his apprentice and again, politely turning to his customer: "Aren't you Mr. Dukhovetzsky?"

"Yes," said the lawyer a little puzzled until he recognised the shopkeeper. "Quite so, and you were the Foreman of the Jury yesterday."

"That's right!" said the old man self-consciously.

While the boy was wrapping up the shawls which the lawyer had bought Dukhovetzsky began to talk to the shopkeeper:

"Now you must admit—the affair is over now, but, frankly—your condemnation of the

prisoner yesterday. . . . You brought in the wrong verdict."

"The wrong verdict? What do you mean?" the old man replied. "It was absolutely the right verdict."

"But, good Heavens, he is not the murderer!" cried the lawyer excitedly with his nose twitching violently. "I am as convinced of that as of the fact that I am standing in front of you now."

The old man was silent for a moment.

"Well, what of it? The truth is the truth. I won't conceal anything. It was not he who committed the murder," the shopkeeper suddenly blurted out sharply and clearly, watching the lawyer out of the corner of his eye.

Dukhovetzsky was aghast:

"Not he?"

"Of course he did not do it. Zakhar did not shoot Klim Ivanovich. Petenka, the idiot, did. We all know that well enough."

Dukhovetzsky had not been prepared for this revelation. Although he had expressed his suspicion that the murderer might easily

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have been an inmate of the house, he had not for a moment thought of the half-wit.

"What do you mean? The idiot?"

"To be sure. You have seen the idiot—Petenka?"

"Yes. I saw him——"

"Well, it was he who killed Klim Ivanovich Dikoy."

"But. . . . Look here. . . ."

"There is nothing to be done about it. We knew all along, but we kept quiet about it. Petenka shot him. You remarked very aptly that the murderer might have been in the house. . . . Petenka was in the house."

Dukhovetzsky was silent for a long time, and he stared fixedly at the shopkeeper, who returned his stare with calm assurance.

"Well," muttered the lawyer at last. "But if you know it, why——? Look here, why did you send a man whom you knew to be innocent to prison?"

"What do you mean by innocent? Whose was the guilt?"

"But you said yourself——"

"I said that Petenka shot his brother. Petenka *did* shoot him. But Zakhar was the cause of it all. Petenka killed his brother for Zakhar's sake. He loved Zakhar very much. Ever since Zakhar was driven out of the house the idiot had been pining for him. He was also very sorry for Glafira. Well, he is an idiot and did not realise that the love of those two was a deadly sin. An idiot is like a saint, who does not understand such things. Klim Ivanovich was a hard hot-headed man; he had always bullied the idiot while the other two had always petted him. They would give him money and sweets. . . . Well, that is why the idiot shot Klim Ivanovich. He thought he could help Zakhar by doing so . . . with his idiotic mind, of course. . . . Well, what were we to do? Inform against him or what? Hadn't he taken the guilt upon himself, committed murder and imperiled his salvation? And Zakhar was the cause of it all! If he had not yielded to his own lust and led his brother's wife into temptation nothing would

have happened. Is he to suffer for his crime or not? What do you think?"

"What do I think? . . . In spite of all that he is not the murderer!"

"Eh, little father, the murderer is not always the man who does the shooting! As you have seen, even an idiot can fire a gun. Zakhар has murdered his own soul. He has killed Petenka's soul and ruined Glafira, and brought Klim Ivanovich to his death—and for what? He must expiate his sins here on earth. Perhaps God will forgive him for the sake of his sufferings. Let him suffer. . . . We could not all agree at first, but I said: 'We've argued enough! Write down that he is guilty. If he is not guilty it will help him in the next world.' "

"A strange course of reasoning," murmured Dukhovetzsky.

"Well, we reason according to our understanding," replied the old man without taking offence.

"But then . . . then his mother and Glafira knew it also?"

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“Of course they knew it.”

“And they kept silent.”

“They have kept silent because they acknowledge the sin.”

“Then why did they call me in?”

“Well, that was a woman’s weakness. They love him. After all, one is his mother, and the other his mistress. They probably thought that if it was God’s will to set him free he would make us bring in a verdict of not guilty! —and then it would be His will, His holy will!”

“But, pardon me, as Counsel for the Defence I am in duty bound to enter an appeal against this verdict.”

“As you please, but I should not advise you to do so,” said the old man once more looking at the lawyer out of the corner of his eye.

“You understand, I have no right to keep silent when I know. . . .”

The shopkeeper smiled slyly and subtly.

“And what do you know, little father?”

“You told me yourself. . . .”

Miloslowsky shrugged his shoulders.

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"I told you? I have told you nothing."

Dukhovetzsky went red in the face with anger.

"Do you deny your own words?" he exclaimed.

"Of course I should deny them."

"But that is. . . . You know——"

The old man's face took on a solemn and almost religious expression. He looked at the open door as if to make sure that no one could hear him, and then he said to the apprentice:

"Volodka, go out into the street and stay there for a short while."

The boy looked at him understandingly, came from behind the counter and ran out.

"Let me tell you something," said the old man, "Leave things as they are! Don't get mixed up in it. I know you are an educated man, and you educated men have your own ideas about these things, perhaps. But take my advice! I don't wish you any harm. Keep your fingers out of it! You'll do no good anyhow. What more can I say? I'm very sorry for Zakhar, of course. He is a fine good-

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hearted fellow, a real man. But think it out for yourself! Suppose he were acquitted and set free. He can't walk about with a millstone round his neck, a dead weight on his soul for life. His conscience would torture him to death. You must not forget that because of his sin one of his brothers died without absolution, and the other has gone to perdition, and that he has brought everlasting shame to his family. Do you think he could live with such a sin on his conscience? Believe me when I tell you that he would take to drink, ruin his family, torture Glafira, and perhaps raise his own hand against himself. . . . Prison? . . . What of it? People do not die of it, and they often live all the happier for it. There is nothing in that, take my word for it. Let him suffer—let him cleanse his soul! I tell you, leave it alone!"

The old man seemed to be deeply moved and his voice trembled.

Dukhovetzsky was filled with consternation and a feeling of awe.

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"But," he said desperately. "I can't. It is my duty."

The old shopkeeper made no reply but his face grew stern and forbidding. Dukhovetzsky looked at him with an expression almost of entreaty.

"Perhaps you are right from your point of view. But I can't see it with your eyes."

"You must decide that for yourself," muttered Miloslowsky gloomily.

"But how can I willingly allow an innocent man to be sent to prison? You understand me, don't you?"

"We understand you," said the shopkeeper reluctantly, and without looking up, "but you don't seem to understand us, little father."

"I really don't know," said Dukhovetzsky, suddenly tired out. "After all. . . ."

The old man said nothing.

"After all, perhaps you are right."

For a time neither spoke. Dukhovetzsky felt depressed and perplexed as though he were guilty of something.

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“Well,” he said at last, “goodbye. Glad to have met you.”

“Begging your pardon.”

Dukhovetzsky raised his hat and turned irresolutely to the door.

“You have forgotten your parcel,” said the old man.

“O, yes, of course. . . .”

Dukhovetzsky came back, took his parcel and left the shop deeply troubled in his mind.

The shopkeeper looked after him disapprovingly, went back to his desk, and reached out for his tea which in the meantime had grown cold.

As Dukhovetzsky drove to the station, through the dreary wet fields, over which the crows flew croaking, the hard impenetrable countenance of the old man went with him. His soul was filled with anguish, all the ideals and reforms for which as a politician he had worked with such energy and enthusiasm began to take on a very different aspect, lost in the gloom of a dark forbidding prospect, tainted with and steeped in blood. He looked

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down at the muddy road as it slipped past him and he thought:

"Yes. We do not understand them! We speak another language! . . . Retribution? . . . Yes. They will shed blood in streams and then turn retribution upon themselves, and suffer again for that every punishment, every catastrophe, every disaster. . . . Savages? . . . Only savages! . . . And yet, perhaps——"

All around, as far as the eye could see, stretched the fields, greenish, rusty-yellow, earthy-dark. The bleak horizon dissolved and melted into the grey boundless sky. Crows with shabby wings flew low across the road. A moist gusty wind began to stir. It was very cold.

Dukhovetzsky raised the collar of his coat and jammed his hat down on his head.

THE END

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